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**Attainment of a global perspective  
through study abroad programmes in Hong Kong**

**By**

**Annie Yan Ni CHENG**

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance  
with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education in  
the Graduate School of Education

**February 2011**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The expansion of student mobility in terms of short-term study abroad programmes has important political, economic, academic, societal and cultural dimensions and outcomes for the sending and host institutions and their countries, and for the students involved in these programmes. This study aims to understand study abroad student perceptions of their 'short-term study abroad' experience on student mobility in the context of Hong Kong higher education. Its objectives are to examine students' perceptions of these study abroad programmes in terms of their perceived value, the issues facing them in deciding their participation in these programmes, as well as the views of attaining a global perspective. The study was conducted in the eight higher education institutions in Hong Kong, using both quantitative and qualitative methods. This study also reveals the different lenses of viewing short-term study abroad programmes taken by the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students who study in Hong Kong in the context of 'one country two cultures'. The results show that the short-term study abroad programmes: (1) benefit broader learning experience; (2) have little value in terms of professional and employment advantages; and (3) are an effective means of broadening students' experiencing of a global perspective. The implications of integrating short-term study abroad programmes into higher education curricula are discussed, including the benefits to student learning and mobility in internationalising higher education.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, Dad, Mum, Anna, Cheung, Doris, Auntie Fat and Grandma, for their patience, unconditional love and support.

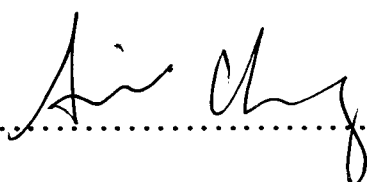
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Last, but not least, I am deeply indebted to my critical friend, Elson, who gave me invaluable advice and encouragement during this special journey. This dissertation is also dedicated to the memory of my best friend Vicky who has joined the Heavenly Father during this course.

## DECLARATION

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of Bristol. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: .....DATE: ...11 October 2010...

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# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **STUDENT MOBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

The recent financial tsunami has tightened governments' public budget in various ways while unemployment rates around the world are reaching new highs. Interestingly, under such circumstances, the European Commission (2009) opened a five-month public consultation on the Green Paper on Promoting the Learning Mobility of Young People, from July to December 2009. It aims at making the learning mobility of young Europeans a clear mandate rather than an option. What learning mobility means to the EC is that 'transnational mobility for the purpose of acquiring new skills is one of the fundamental ways in which individuals, particularly young people, can strengthen their future employability as well as their personal development' (European Commission 2009: 2). As a challenging socio-educational initiative in the post financial tsunami period, the promotion of the learning mobility of young generations is also flourishing in other places. In Australia, Monash University (2010) has a distinguished education system, the 'Monash Passport', which offers a wide range of overseas study programmes including full semester exchanges at more than 120 universities around the world, intercampus exchanges at Monash campuses in Malaysia and South Africa, and more than 50 short-term study abroad programmes. Commencing their study with Monash University, the students are required to participate in these passport programmes. Their objective is to broaden the students' learning experiences, perspectives and development.

Likewise, Hong Kong universities have infused similar exchange or short-term study abroad programmes in their curricula since the beginning of the century. However, few research studies have been undertaken to examine the effects of these programmes on student learning and curriculum reform of higher education

institutions in Hong Kong. By way of contrast, other governments and overseas universities have initiated investing a large amount of resources in integrating various types of study abroad programmes in their higher education curricula. This is where I begin my research study. What are the students' attitudes and aptitudes arising as a result of 'study abroad' programmes in the context of Hong Kong higher education?

## **1.0 Introduction**

What is 'student mobility'? What are the factors influencing this phenomenon? What are the current student flows and factors driving these flows? Why is it important to study these matters? This chapter attempts to answer these questions by giving an overview of the issues concerning student mobility by studying abroad. It explores the concepts, and states the objectives and personal interests that formulate the research questions of this study. The significance and contribution of this study are also explicated. Lastly, it concludes by outlining the structure of this dissertation.

## **1.1 Student Mobility by Studying Abroad**

'Student mobility' in higher education refers to those students who are either studying abroad to undertake the whole course abroad; or participating in study abroad programmes in another country for a short duration, from a few weeks to two semesters, as a course component of a degree awarded in their own country. The increasing expansion of this student mobility has significant implications of political, economic, academic, societal and cultural dimensions for both the sending and the host institutions and their countries. This phenomenon of student mobility is argued to be due to the rapidity of economic globalisation and the introduction of market-oriented mechanisms which are exerting an increasingly significant influence on the internationalisation of higher education in many countries (Huang, 2007).



In this context, student mobility has become one of the hottest topics of internationalisation of higher education in recent decades. As a topic it has also attracted both policy makers and researchers' serious attention regarding the development of international higher education programmes (Li, 2006). The following sections will give an overview of the current student flows and the factors driving the flows. It delineates the concept of student mobility and the recent trends of contemporary study abroad programmes. Then, I will discuss the importance of study abroad programmes to the internationalisation of higher education.

### *1.1.1 An overview of student flows in international higher education and the factors driving the flows*

Student mobility keeps on evolving with the ever-expanding international education markets. The global trend shows that the number of students enrolled outside their country of citizenship in higher education has grown dramatically from just over 600,000 worldwide in 1975 to 3 million in 2008, which is more than a four-fold increase over the past three decades (Project Atlas, 2010). Asia is an important region for advancing international study by sending students and members of faculty abroad for advanced studies and research. Over 75% of international and foreign students enrolled in the tertiary education of the OECD member countries were from Asia in 2008 (OECD, 2010). For decades, students in the East who crossed international borders usually flowed to countries in the West to advance their higher education. Today, significant east-to-east or even west-to-east flows are occurring, and flows in all directions are growing rapidly. These kinds of activities have brought people from diverse cultures into exchange with each other in an environment focused on learning and intellectual exchange.

Competition in recruiting international or exchange students is increasingly keen. The main reason is the growing number of higher education opportunities for both studying abroad and at home (OBHE, 2007). The Observatory of Borderless Higher Education's (OBHE: 2007) *International Student Mobility: Patterns and*

*Trends* report classifies four types of players with respect to market share: (1) Major Players – the USA (22%), the UK (12%) and Australia (11%); (2) Middle Powers - Germany (10%) and France (10%); (3) Evolving Destinations - Japan (5%), Canada (5%) and New Zealand (3%); and (4) Emerging Contenders - Malaysia (2%), Singapore (2%) and China (7%).

To attract prospective students who wish to pursue studying abroad, individual institutions and national governments are developing and implementing targeted recruitment strategies to enhance their market competitiveness. Each group of players has a different focus in developing their programmes for attracting international students. The ‘Major Players’ argue that student mobility is essential if they are to ensure their competitiveness, while the ‘Emerging Contenders’ want to share an increasing portion of the market share (OBHE, 2007). The ‘Middle Powers’ have begun to increase the number of courses taught in English as the medium of instruction in order to compete in the global education market. The ‘Emerging Contenders’- Singapore, Malaysia and China – once major importers of education services or a source of students sent to other countries in the past, are rethinking their advantages of developing their cultural synergies for the regional markets. In these contexts, the term ‘cultural synergy’, means that people from different cultural backgrounds with variable ideas, expectations and practices of cultures of learning engage in mutual effort to learn about, understand and appreciate others’ cultures and their interpretations of learning, thus, reciprocally to learn with and from others (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). Although the ‘Emerging Players’ have the least market share among all contenders, they are identified as having taken active measures to recruit international students. The measures adopted to increase their competitiveness over the past couple of years include the allocation of resources to become ‘world class’ institutions over the next decade. With these incentive measures, the players expect to have some success in getting some market share with their relatively low fees (OBHE, 2007).

China’s rapid economic growth and educational change in such a short time have made it the most important target of the international education market. ‘China now ranks as the fourth largest economy in the world. Urban incomes, especially

in east coast cities, have correspondingly increased notably. This has created a large and growing potential market for international students (British Council, 2008). Regarding China as the largest supplier of international students to countries around the world over the past decade, both the U.S. and the UK have directly targeted this market with specific strategies. International students, including those from Western countries, may find that there are career advantages to learning the Chinese language and culture in those countries while being able to study courses in English as the medium of instruction, and experience a familiar socio-cultural environment. It should be noted that the number of international students studying in China will continue to grow, particularly from Asian destinations, and it will become a competitive threat to the major players.

However, the tendency to internationalise higher education by adopting English as the medium of instruction is a concern for some governments. For example, the Danish government worries that it would create tensions within the academy as the country's growing reliance on English would eventually lead to social fragmentation by creating an elite class that uses English as its lingua franca (Labi, 28 Sept 2007). Also, it is cautioned that some important knowledge is in danger of becoming lost, along with cultural knowledge that is linguistically encoded. Furthermore, since a larger amount of the student flow is mainly from developing countries, global inequalities or 'brain drain' issues are also reflected in student mobility (OECD, 2008).

In sum, the attributes or factors of attracting international students depend on the adoption of English as the medium of instruction; the career advantages in learning other languages and cultures; the advantages of developing cultural synergies for the regional markets; and low fees. The in-flow and out-flow of international students from and into overseas higher education institutions not only internationalise the higher education of the respective countries, but also importantly evidence student mobility through studying-abroad activities, be they long-term or short-term.

### *1.1.2 Concept of student mobility in the trajectory of university education*

Student mobility is not a new phenomenon in the trajectory of university education. In the mid-1800s, John Henry Newman regarded that ‘a University is a place of concourse, whither students come from every quarter for every kind of knowledge’ and that it is like a ‘village’ (Newman, 1959). One significant characteristic of the universities of the Middle Ages was the concept of ‘cosmopolitanism’ and ‘borderlessness’ (Jin 2000: 2). Then, Flexner (1930) advanced his idea of a modern university as a ‘town’. Later on in 1963, Kerr (2001) argued that the ‘multiversity’ was a city of infinite variety. This contemporary idea of a university is that ‘the city is more like the totality of civilisation as it has evolved and become more an integral part of it; movement to and from the surrounding society has been greatly accelerated’ (Kerr 2001:31). In ancient China, more than 2,000 years ago, Confucius led his students on tours to different states to acquire and spread knowledge (Kuo, 2009). With the increasing flow of knowledge and people in the midst of the internationalisation of higher education in the context of globalisation, student mobility has become an authentic idea and valuable component in modern university education.

Understanding the concept of student mobility has become increasingly significant to formulating education policy and initiating research. Demands for greater exposure to a wider scope of learning in higher education is needed for the emergence of the post-industrial information age, and the explosive growth and distributed nature of new knowledge is needed (Cunningham et al., 2000). Since the mid 1990s, the institutional, national, regional and global policies have been dominated by the idea of the rapid growth of the global knowledge economy (Robertson, 2005). Therefore, it is not uncommon to find that the policy-makers and politicians illustrate that they are shaping our future in terms of this knowledge economy. This includes beliefs that (1) education will play a critical role in economic growth, and (2) to play such role, education systems will need to respond in new ways to the demands of the knowledge economy (Robertson, 2005). In this respect, the growth of this student mobility has also been driven by

the view that education systems need to be responsive to the demands of a more globalised economy.

Because of economic globalisation, all countries are engaged in international trade and usually most of this trade contributes a significant proportion of national income (Held & McGrew, 1998). Countries are urged to invest their resources in developing different tools, models and strategies to respond to this economic development as per OECD (2008: 52-3) accounts; that growth in the internationalisation of higher education has accelerated in the past ten years and is, in effect, 'mirroring the globalisation of economies and societies'. Since the internationalisation of education is regarded as one of the key outcomes in response to this economic change, it aims to 'generate a more competitive environment and entrepreneurial individuals within the context of lifelong learning' (Robertson 2005: 152). Therefore, the internationalisation of higher education and student mobility are interrelated and interdependent in the form of study abroad programmes. In particular, revisiting the concept of student mobility is one of the pressing issues to be discussed in the changing scope of higher education.

### ***1.1.3 Recent trends in contemporary study abroad programmes and student mobility***

In the context of the internationalisation of higher education, study abroad programmes are a particular form of student mobility in the transborder recruitment of students. Whilst not a new initiative, their scope and scale have become a notable policy focus of governments around the world. Understanding recent trends of study abroad programmes can help policymakers and education researchers address the issues of student mobility which affect the development of international education and the expansion of international student intakes. As a consequence, the strategic and resource planning of higher education can be affected.

Generally, student mobility can be classified into two major categories, namely long-term studying abroad which involves undertaking the whole course abroad, and short-term programmes of a short duration, from a few weeks to two semesters, as a course component of a degree awarded in one's own country. There are differences between these two types of student mobility. Since I mainly focus on the short-term study abroad programmes in this study, a brief account of several contemporary study abroad programmes in different regions is outlined. They include the FULBRIGHT programme of the U.S., ERASMUS in Europe, the Endeavour Awards of Australia, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, and examples of exchange programmes from Singapore, China and Hong Kong.

FULBRIGHT is the largest U.S. international exchange program that offers opportunities and provides funding for students, scholars, and professionals to undertake international graduate study, research and teaching worldwide. It was established in 1946 and is sponsored by the Institute of International Education (IIE<sup>1</sup>). It aims to increase mutual understanding between the peoples of the United States and other countries through the exchange of persons, knowledge, and skills. Its rationale is to promote 'peace and prosperity in the 21st Century by increasing the capacity of people to think and work on a global and intercultural basis (IIE, 2009).

In Europe, the ERASMUS programme was established in 1987 to provide support for short-term intra-European student mobility participating in an integrated period of study of between 6 months and 12 months across Europe (Teichler & Janson, 2007). Participating students are exempt from paying tuition fees at the host institution, and some may even be awarded a grant to cover the travel and

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<sup>1</sup> IIE is an independent nonprofit organisation founded in 1919, in the aftermath of World War I, by Nobel Peace Prize winners Nicholas Murray Butler, President of Columbia University, and Elihu Root, former Secretary of State, and by Stephen Duggan, Sr., Professor of Political Science at the College of the City of New York and IIE's first President. They believed that there could be no lasting peace without greater understanding between nations—and that international educational exchange formed the strongest basis for fostering such understanding. It is one of the world's most experienced international education and training organisations and is delivering programmes to a diverse range of participants, sponsors, and donors.

subsistence costs incurred in connection with their study period (Rivza & Teichler, 2007). Since then, temporary student mobility in Europe has spread substantially (Teichler & Janson, 2007). The objectives of this short-term study programme are to enable students to benefit educationally, linguistically and culturally from the experience of learning in other European countries; to promote co-operation between institutions and to enrich the educational environment of the host institutions; to contribute to the development of a pool of well-qualified, open-minded and internationally experienced young people as future professionals; and to facilitate credit transfer and recognition of periods abroad, utilizing a compatible credit system. The European Union decided to extend its support for student mobility to cover new areas such as student placements in enterprises, university staff training, and teaching for enterprise staff. As a sub-programme, ERASMUS became part of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme from late 2007 onwards, replacing SOCRATES (from 1995 to 2007). Furthermore, the European Parliament and Council further approved the Erasmus Mundus programme in 2003. It aims to allow students from third-world countries to study in Europe.

Australia's Endeavour Awards is an 'internationally competitive, merit-based scholarship programme providing opportunities for citizens of the Asia-Pacific and Middle East regions to undertake study, research and professional development in Australia as well as for Australians to do the same abroad' (Endeavour, 2010). In recognizing the supposed benefits of undergraduate student exchanges, the Australian Government has been funding Australian higher education providers to subsidise the costs of students participating in student exchanges since 1993. It aims to deepen Australia's global engagement in education and research; reinforce Australia's reputation as a high quality education provider and leader in research, innovation and knowledge management; enhance language skills and cultural understanding of Australia; and provide opportunities for Australian professionals to enhance their skills and knowledge. These International Student Exchange Programmes are tuition fee waiving and credit transferable.

Among Asian countries, Japanese student exchange is the most developed. The Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme, established in 1987, is aimed at increasing mutual understanding between the people of Japan and other nations, promoting internationalisation by helping to improve foreign language education and developing international exchange in Japan's communities. The number of countries sending participants has risen over the years. In 2007, this programme sent 5,119 participants from 41 countries to work in public schools and government offices throughout Japan to promote language skills and international exchange at the local level (JET, 2010). There are currently approximately 41,000 JET alumni who have stayed in Japan for a period of a year to a maximum of 5 years.

In Singapore, the lack of systematic large-scale funding means that the promotion of exchange student programmes is largely dependent on individual institutions such as the National University of Singapore (NSU). By showing its 'commitment to global education', NSU arranges more than 1,000 undergraduate exchange students each year to spend a semester or two at an overseas partner university, earning credits towards their NSU degree. It aims to provide a chance for students to pick up a new language, absorb new cultures and make new friends. It also believes that these overseas experiences will enhance the students' career options (NSU, 2010).

The China Scholarship Council (CSC), a non-profit institution affiliated with the Ministry of Education in the People's Republic of China, whose objective is to provide, in accordance with the law, statutes and relevant principles and policies of China, financial assistance to those Chinese citizens wishing to study abroad and to foreign citizens wishing to study in China in order to develop the educational, scientific and technological fields, and cultural exchanges and economic and trade cooperation between China and other countries, to strengthen the friendship and understanding between Chinese people and the people of all other countries, and to promote world peace and the socialist modernisation drive in China (CSC, 2010). Unfortunately, no official data of exchange students who have participated in short-term study abroad programmes in Mainland China are



reported. The promotion of a variety of exchange student programmes in higher education is largely dependent on individual institutions, faculties and departments in Mainland China.

Regarding the related policy for study abroad programmes in Hong Kong, the government policy concerning exchange programmes is found in the HKSAR Policy Address (2008). The major aim for this policy is to ‘promote national education’ by offering ‘more opportunities for Hong Kong students to join Mainland study trips and exchange programmes’. Its subsidising scale has even increased to seven times the original quota within a year, from subsidising 5,000 secondary students in 2007/08 to 37,000 junior secondary and upper primary students in 2008/09 (HKSAR Policy Address, 2008). In the 2008/09 school year, over 20,000 students participated in 45 such exchange activities organised by non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In the 2009/10 school year, the Government also planned to subsidise 37,000 students to join various Mainland exchange programmes. In addition, the government has included national education as one of the priority themes for the Quality Education Fund. In 2009, the Fund approved various activities, including projects to enhance learning effectiveness in national education and study tours to the Mainland (HKSAR Policy Address, 2009).

For the higher education sector, a variety of Hong Kong exchange student programmes are also dependent on individual institutions, faculties and departments as per Singapore or Mainland China. For example, the University of Hong Kong (HKU) Worldwide Undergraduate Student Exchange Programme was established in 1997. It serves to enhance students' global perspectives and foster cross-cultural understanding among students of participating institutions (HKU, 2010). It expects that 25 percent of undergraduate students in HKU will have the chance to go outside Hong Kong for exchange activities. However, this exchange programme has only provided limited scholarships or sponsorship and is mainly market-driven. The Hong Kong Institute of Education (HKIEd, 2010) also offers an exchange programme in order to consolidate its strategic partnerships with universities and schools of education within the region. It emphasizes promoting

study abroad programmes to its students for five reasons: to broaden the scope of the student's degree by taking subjects that may not usually be available at HKIEd, such as language and culture, European literature and culture, etc.; to enable students to study at some of the most prestigious universities around the world; to improve students' English language proficiency; to develop a greater understanding of other cultures; and to enhance students' employment prospects by allowing them to graduate with an 'international edge'.

In view of these recent trends, I observe that the study abroad programmes, especially the short-term programmes, characterize student mobility in the following ways: they enhance students' language skills; they prepare students to be future professionals in the global market; and they increase mutual understanding between cultures through international study experiences. These characteristics of student mobility of the short-term programmes are not only gaining increasing influence on the education policies and development of international education, but are also shaping the global perceptive of those students who have the experience of studying abroad.

#### *1.1.4 Why are study abroad programmes important for the internationalisation of higher education?*

As transborder student mobility continues to steadily expand, ever increasing attention is being directed to its growth and development. Student mobility is partly a result of government or institutional policies driving the internationalisation of higher education. For many institutions, increasing international enrollments in their higher education systems is a central aspect of an overall internationalisation mission (Huang, 2007; IIE, 2007). Higher education institutions are not only seeking to increase the number of student enrolments, but also to develop a diversity of study abroad programmes to attract those students. While growing numbers of students in higher education are participating in study abroad programmes, education institutions are also increasing the promotion of these programmes. It is evident that all types of

players, with reference to both governments and institutions, are setting up strategies to attract students.

Students' considerations for studying abroad and participating in short-term study abroad programmes are varied. They may be affected by the government or institutional policies of their own or the host country. It is also due to a general demand from the students and their parents that is tied to the students' career strategies (Teichler & Janson, 2007; Waters, 2007) and tied up with various aspects of the positively perceived value of the programmes that might be able to bring significant impact to their lives. Research shows that participation in study abroad programmes can lead to positive outcomes, such as enhanced academic, professional and intellectual growth, language skills, personal development, increased global mindedness, international competence, cultural understanding and increased job skills and impact on employment (Dolby, 2005; Perrucci & Hu, 1995; Thot, 1998; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). Other issues facing students when considering studying abroad include financial and institutional factors, social background as well as security issues (Opper *et al.*, 1990; Tremblay, 2003; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). These are the issues that would influence students' decision-making and subsequent choice of study abroad destination.

Conventional wisdom in the study abroad field has believed that the longer students study abroad, the more significant the academic and cultural development and personal growth benefits (Dwyer & Peters, 2004). This raises important questions about the different experiences of students as they engage in a different mode of mobility. As different stakeholders including governments, institutions and students are spending a large amount of resources on study abroad programmes and have diverse expectations at the same time, it is important to examine these issues and the importance of study abroad programmes in order to inform better use of these stakeholders' resources.

Various research studies have been conducted to evaluate the effect of long-term student mobility or individual short-term study abroad programmes on the participants. One common method is where the provider of the programme, either

an individual faculty member or department, asks the participants to fill in pre- and post- surveys measuring their satisfaction with the programme objectives such as housing and personal growth (Walker, 1999: Posey, 2003). This kind of study reveals the perceived value and impacts of those programmes on students from different institutions in order to grasp a broader sense of students' perceptions. However, a review of the literature reveals a lack of larger-scale and well-designed research that attempts to measure student perspectives of short-term study abroad participation. Meanwhile, as students are expected to compete with people from different parts of the world in this globalizing era, it is also necessary to examine whether or not they are aware of this phenomenon or if they are ready for this challenge. One way of achieving this purpose is to investigate their views and their attainment of a global perspective. However, few studies focus on investigating the students' perception of a global perspective and the influence of study abroad programmes on the participants in attaining such a perspective. Although all Hong Kong higher education institutions emphasize their development of short-term study abroad programmes, there appears to be a minimal amount of literature on this kind of research in the Hong Kong context. Hence, these are the reasons to explore this topic in this study.

## **1.2 Study Objectives and Personal Interest**

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of students' attitudes and aptitudes arising as a result of 'study abroad' programmes in the context of Hong Kong higher education. In particular, its objectives are to examine students' perceptions of these study abroad programmes in terms of their perceived value, the issues facing them in deciding to participate in such programmes, as well as the views of attainment of a global perspective. China's rapid economic growth and educational change in such a short time have made it the leading target of the international student market; thus, investigating Mainland Chinese students' views of study abroad participation is also essential for Hong Kong's education development. Therefore, I not only compare the responses of the study abroad and non study abroad students, but I also compare the perceptions and the experiences

of the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students in order to gain a wider spectrum of findings. The two comparison groups of participants are: (1) Study Abroad (SA) and Non Study Abroad (NSA) students; and (2) the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students. The distribution groups of the participants in this study are shown in Table 1.1 below:

*Table 1.1 Distribution groups of participants of the study*

	Mainland Chinese students (ML)	Hong Kong (HK)
Study Abroad (SA)	16	64
Non Study Abroad (NSA)	16	42
Total	32	106

By analysing the study data, I aim to identify and explore in further detail the factors that may affect international students’ decisions regarding studying abroad, and to explore ways to improve study abroad programmes for facilitating individual students, higher education institutions and governments.

Personally, I was an overseas student who studied for my undergraduate degree in Australia. It was a life-changing experience for me. Since then, I have been interested in researching whether, and how, study abroad programmes change students’ lives, particularly relating to the issues of cultural difference. As a researcher, I often interview students to investigate their development on campus. I have found that some graduate students regard that their study abroad experience, through exchange or immersion programmes, was the most influential factor in developing their professionalism. Moreover, I have also found that the perceptions or views of Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students are quite different. These findings have aroused my interest in conducting research on student mobility. I also want to learn more about those differences between Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students.

### **1.3 Formulating the Research Questions**

Generally, the relationship between student mobility and globalisation has so far been addressed with regard to certain groups or specific circumstances. I have chosen to focus on investigating the students' perceptions of short-term study abroad programmes in higher education as an exploratory study for this type of research. The duration of these short-term programmes ranges from a few weeks to one semester.

In order to accomplish the objectives of this study, I set the following research questions:

- (1) What are the students' perceived value and the impacts of study abroad programmes in higher education?
- (2) What issues do the students face in deciding to participate in a study abroad programme?
- (3) What are the students' views on attaining a global perspective and how do study abroad programmes contribute to attaining a global perspective?

To understand the complexities of student mobility phenomena emerging in short-term study abroad in the context of Hong Kong higher education, it is necessary to adopt this mixed methodology comprised of quantitative and qualitative research methods by which data were collected and analysed from multi-level perspectives. This methodology triangulated the questionnaire data (one round) with the interview data (two rounds) collected in different phases including two pilot studies.

### **1.4 Significance of the Study**

This study seeks to contribute to the literature of study abroad experiences by discussing the significance of short-term study abroad programmes in reshaping curricula in the context of international higher education. The methodology developed in this study can be considered as a pilot of similar research projects set

against the wider background of globalisation. This study aims to provide insights into study mobility by way of these programmes in terms of the attainment of a global perspective in the wave of the internationalisation of higher education. Those insights can inform policymakers and senior management of universities in formulating national and/or institutional strategies and planning for internationalizing higher education by seriously considering the emerging value of student mobility through short-term study abroad programmes.

Following conducting this study, it is expected that the findings can help us better understand students' decisions to study abroad in terms of their perceived value and impacts of study abroad programmes, as well as the issues facing them in deciding to study abroad. Comparing the findings for the study abroad and non study abroad participants, it attempts to explore different perceptions of global perspective so as to explain the influence of study abroad participation. In addition, comparing the findings for the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students, it is hoped to reveal the different lenses taken by different cultures in viewing study abroad programmes.

## **1.5 Structure of the Dissertation**

This study is presented in nine chapters. Chapter 1 gives an overview of the issues concerning student mobility in terms of study abroad programmes. It explores these issues, delineates the objectives of and personal interest in this study that formulates the research questions. It also explicates the significance and contribution of this study.

The literature review provided in Chapters 2 and 3 serves as the formative framework of this study. Chapter 2 discusses the issues of the internationalisation of higher education and student mobility by addressing the emerging discourses of universities concerned with the notion of a globalising economy and the need for the attainment of a global perspective. It also introduces the concepts, categories and trends of student mobility in international higher education in general.

Chapter 3 elaborates the issue of student mobility in terms of the perceived value of contemporary study abroad programmes. An overview of the short-term study abroad programmes in different regions and the flows of students are outlined. The significance of student mobility in higher education is also addressed by examining the perceived value of student mobility and issues facing students in deciding to study abroad. Then, it extends the discourse of attaining a global perspective through study abroad programmes. Finally, I conclude this chapter by framing the research questions of this study.

Chapter 4 explains the methodology and rationales of the research. The study design is explained by adopting both quantitative and qualitative methods. The methods, including a questionnaire, interviews and documentation, are justified. Its data sampling, collection and analysis are portrayed. This chapter also discusses the reliability and validity, limitations and ethical issues of this study.

Chapters 5 to 8 presents an analysis of the empirical data from the questionnaire survey from the higher education institutions in Hong Kong. For each of these chapters, the findings are generally listed by themes and their categorisations derived from the data in order: first, by quantitative data which shows the trends of the findings followed by the interview data which are served to be complementary to the survey findings; and then more insights on the issues are explicated. Chapter 5 delineates and analyses the students' characteristics of the questionnaire respondents and interviewees. In particular, it makes a comparison with this study's participants with the populations of Hong Kong higher education students from the government statistics, and the study abroad participants from some of the higher education institutions.

Chapter 6 reports the findings of data analysis in terms of the students' preference in selecting the host country for the study abroad programme; the students' perceived value of participating in a study abroad programme; and the perceived impact of these programmes on their learning experience.



Chapter 7 addresses the issues facing these students in deciding to join the programmes. It also compares the results of the two groups: study abroad and non study abroad participants; and Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students in viewing study abroad programmes from the aspects of the objectives, considerations in deciding to study abroad, and preferences in selecting the host country.

Chapter 8 aims to provide insights into the students' perceived impacts of study abroad programmes on attaining a global perspective. It frames the students' perceptions of and the importance of attaining a global perspective through the programmes.

Finally, Chapter 9 concludes this study by summarising the findings in relation to the research questions. It discusses the overall implications of what this means for short-term study abroad. It provides insights into the internationalisation of curricula in the international higher education markets. It also examines the significance of the methodology for studying these phenomena and the limitations of this study. Lastly, it suggests the needs for further research, portrays my personal reflections and makes a final conclusion.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

Study abroad programmes are rapidly and continually expanding. There are increasing discussions on student mobility around the globe (British Council, 2008; IIE, 2009; Project Atlas, 2010). Despite its importance, there are few larger-scale studies focused on investigating students' perceptions of short-term study abroad programmes and the influence of those programmes on the participants in attaining a global perspective. Furthermore, there appears to be minimal literature on this kind of research in the Hong Kong context. Therefore, these are the reasons to explore this topic with this study.

In the midst of globalisation, this study aims to provide insights into study mobility by the programmes in terms of the attainment of a global perspective in

the wave of the internationalisation of higher education. Developing effective programmes that suit individual institutional and student needs that contribute to the students' success is the ultimate goal of all institutions. Above all, this study seeks to not only enhance our understanding of student mobility, but also to inform the programme design and development for higher education institutions in several ways: by providing a picture of students' study abroad experiences; by identifying the motivation and dilemmas that students face in considering studying abroad; by analysing the phenomenon of students' pursuit of cross-border higher education and participation in exchange programmes; by examining the similarities and differences in the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students' perceptions of the value of these programmes to not only enhance our mutual understandings, but also to help improve study abroad programmes by accommodating the needs of both types of students; and finally by reflecting on students' perspectives for programme development so that ways to improve the programme design could be recommended following the findings of this research.

This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of student mobility in the context of Hong Kong higher education. It discusses the significance of short-term study abroad programmes in reshaping curricula in the context of international higher education. Moreover, the methodology developed in this study can be considered as a pilot of similar research projects. It can be replicated in other studies with similar settings for larger research across countries and regions, particularly for the China region.

In the next two chapters, Chapters 2 and 3, I will review and discuss the concepts, categories and conceptual frameworks of student mobility based on the literature.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **INTERNATIONALISATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENT MOBILITY**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

The internationalisation of higher education has become a significant mission for many universities. Student mobility is a means of internationalisation of higher education. It is advocated for different reasons and purposes by different stakeholders in various countries. The following two chapters aim to frame the issues of internationalisation of higher education and student mobility. The literature review serves as the formative framework of this study. In Chapter 2, I talk about student mobility in general, addressing the emerging discourses of universities concerned with the notion of a globalising economy in terms of the internationalisation of higher education and the need for the attainment of a global perspective. I introduce the concepts, categories and trends of student mobility in international higher education. Then, I will look into short-term study abroad programmes as a component of a degree awarded in one's own country in Chapter 3. In these two chapters, I will also discuss two different forms of student mobility: long-term studying abroad and short-term study abroad programmes. Subsequently, I will explain how I construct the research questions for this study.

#### **2.1 Emerging Discourses of University in the Notion of a Globalised Economy**

The word '*university*' is derived from the Latin '*universitas magistrorum et scholarium*', meaning 'community of teachers and scholars.' John Henry

Newman's *The Idea of a University*, written one and a half centuries ago, has encouraged us to rethink the conceptualisation of higher education. In the mid-1800s, Newman regarded the university as a 'village' (Newman, 1959). By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a globalised economy was argued to have emerged, referring to the ways in which 'economies are linked to each other, forming a global market for investments, goods, services and labour' (OECD 2008:33). Whilst Newman describes that 'a University is a place of concourse, whither students come from every quarter for every kind of knowledge', universities in a globalised economy are involved in highly intensive knowledge products (OECD, 2008; Robertson, 2009).

If these two concepts are embodied in the recent discussion of the internationalisation of higher education in the notion of a globalised economy, then Newman's conception of an idea of a university is still enjoying currency even after one and a half centuries, regardless of Flexner's (1930) claim that the modern university is a 'town', or Kerr's (2001) argument that what has emerged is a 'multiversity' as a city of infinite variety, including those who are refugees of anonymity, both as creative persons and drifters. Different from a village or a town, for Kerr 'the city is more like the totality of civilisation as it has evolved and become more an integral part of it; movement to and from the surrounding society has been greatly accelerated' (Kerr 2001:31). With the increasing flow of knowledge and people in the midst of globalisation, this idea of the university as a town is more authentic, and was even so in ancient China when Confucius led his students on tours to different states to acquire and spread knowledge more than 2,000 years ago (Kuo, 2009). Indeed, Confucian practice was, by and large, a form of transborder teaching and learning, if not a form of internationalisation of higher education.

'Internationalisation of higher education' is a contested idea that is defined or discussed from different positions in the literature. For example, Knight (1997) argues that 'internationalisation' seems to be one of the ways in which a country or institution responds to the impact of globalization of society, economy and labor market, yet at the same time respects the individuality of the

nation/institution. It means 'the process of integrating an international or intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service functions of the institutions' (ibid, 1997:8). For van der Wende (2001), internationalisation of higher education is analysed as a response to globalization and a distinction is made between two paradigms in internationalisation: competition and cooperation. To de Wit (2002), internationalisation of higher education should include the rationale (why), meanings and approaches (what), and strategies and organization models (how) of this phenomenon. In this study, I link this concept of internationalisation of higher education to the dimensions of physical people mobility, academic cooperation and academic knowledge transfer in the higher education sector (Teichler, 2004). It is now the current focus of policymakers in many places, including mainland China and Hong Kong. The emerging discourses on the idea of universities in association with a globalising economy are not new ideas in the internationalisation of higher education.

### ***2.1.1 Internationalisation of higher education and globalisation***

There are a range of understandings of globalisation. One of the definitions refers to the process whereby countries become more integrated via the movement of goods, capital, labor, and ideas (Bloom, 2004). In the age of globalisation, borders have become porous by increasing cultural and technological innovations that have swept across the borders of the nation states (Cohen, 1997). Beck (2002) regards 'globalisation' as a non-linear, dialectic process in which the global and local cultures exist as combined and mutually implicating principles. These processes involve interconnections across boundaries; they also transform the quality of the social and the political inside nation-state societies. Hence, globalisation has become one of the hottest issues of concern to citizens, politicians and economists (Ryan & Stedman, 2001). These issues of global concern are also realised as part of the everyday experiences of developing international higher education through advocating student mobility.

Although globalising higher education markets may be seen to regard education as a commodity, the internationalisation of higher education is, by and large, a

significant mission for many universities (Ryan, 2008). Along with this notion, universities are competing with each other for international students, not only due to the economic gains, but also to the benefits of diversity (Tilak, 2010). Diversity is seen as an essential characteristic for universities in a contemporary sense (IAU, 2005) in that many universities are becoming cosmopolitan such that English is being used as the daily language (Wissema, 2009). Rizvi (2008) argues that this form of international higher education encourages cultural interaction and exchange. Yet, it operates under the new global economic conditions and within the logic of consumption (Rizvi, 2008).

In a post-modern globalised society, those who are mobile are global business people, global culture managers, and global academics. In Bauman's terms (1998), under the conditions of globalisation, the mobility of people largely refers to an elite whom he calls 'tourists'; that is, those who are able to contribute, in one way or another, to the consumer economy. For this elite, nation state borders are leveled down and 'dismantled for the world's commodities, capital and finances' (Bauman 1998: 89). In respect of this, international higher education is an expression of this consumerist logic, available to those who have aligned themselves already to the emerging economic and cultural contours of corporate globalisation (Rizvi 2005a). Any discussion relating to international students cannot escape consideration of the economic aspects of their education, as they articulate their educational experiences in the global consumer culture. It begs the question, however, of whether international students participate in a largely 'economic' exchange and are thus less concerned with the moral and political dimensions of global inter-connectivity (Rizvi, 2005a).

### ***2.1.2 Need for the attainment of a global perspective***

Although policy makers and higher education institutions emphasise the importance of obtaining a global perspective, it seems that they have not clearly defined this term. A 'global perspective' generally refers to aspects including the quality of the global environment, the globalisation of markets, and cultural identities within and crossing national boundaries (Barker, 2000). In this study, a

‘global perspective’ refers to the idea of global connectivity in terms of economic aspects that might link to enhancing economic development and the moral or social aspects such as the notion of global citizenship that enhances different cultural interests for social benefits for the society. Universities are often regarded as having a major responsibility for ‘creating spaces where students are encouraged to explore the contours of global interconnectivity and interdependence, and their implications for questions of identity and culture. Universities are also places where they might develop the skills that enable them to link locally grounded practices of cultural exchange to the broader processes of globalisation’ (Rizvi 2005b: 339).

It is important, therefore, that studies investigate the importance and outcomes of programmes aimed at attaining a ‘global perspective’. Bloom (2004) pointed out the importance of education in promoting global integration in raising students’ productivity and providing a foundation for rapid technological change. Moreover, Bloom argued that a global perspective should promote knowledge and attitudes which can speed up the process of globalisation. More importantly, a global perspective would also prepare students to respond to new threats and new opportunities in this era. It is believed that such perspectives continue to exert an enormous influence around the world, on the one hand, and on how different societies interact with each other in terms of countries, governments, businesses and individuals, on the other.

The problem is that while the research shows that although people may agree there is a need to understand their relationship to other countries and that this is critical to their country’s successes, their education experiences do not, in reality, provide an adequate global perspective (Barker, 2000). Meanwhile, with the emergence of processes of globalisation which emphasize interdependence economically among countries, more and more people, including educators, are aware of the need to enhance in students an international understanding or global perspective in order to equip them to compete in the global market’s future workforce (Pucik, Tichy & Barnett, 1992). In an increasingly growing global society, a global perspective, and skills to compete in the global economy are

regarded as necessary for all who need to be able to participate in and understand our place in such a world.

A US national survey shows that Americans are 'deeply concerned that the United States is not preparing young people with the skills they need to compete in the global economy' (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2007). This finding implies that not only the US government, but also US students, feel a need to compete in the global economy and are therefore concerned as to whether they have obtained the adequate skills. Recognition of the need to have an open mind for actively seeking to understand the cultural norms and expectations of others, and leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate and work effectively outside one's environment, is viewed as essential (Hunter, 2004). This global perspective is reflected in increased demand for the integrating the programmes into the curriculum from business, students and communities, so as to enhance their understanding of what is needed to enable them to compete in a global economy (Barker, 2000).

Although higher education is becoming more market-oriented, it is also argued that training for non-market needs, such as good citizenship, advancing cultural interests, students' capabilities and social benefits for the society, should not be neglected (Kerr, 2001). Learning how to be a global citizen is thus believed to be essential to the successful future of a nation (Kagan & Steward, 2004). Attaining a global perspective is also essential for each individual to develop him/herself into a global citizen. Ong (1999) argues that developing flexible notions of citizenship is increasingly a strategy that is adopted for more mobile individuals so that they might accumulate capital and power in the era of globalisation. The rationale here is that the individual can then act opportunistically, and respond flexibly to the changing political-economic conditions (Ong, 1999).

Student mobility, internationalisation of higher education and global perspective are the key concepts running through this study. These three concepts tend to be a package currently promoted by the policy makers and higher education institutions. Recent research shows that the impact of student mobility is related to



internationalisation in three main aspects: knowledge transfer, international education and research, and border-crossing communication and discourse (Teichler, 2004). As these mobile students could attain a global perspective through this border-crossing of communication and discourse by experiencing learning from different cultures and shaking the old established perspectives because of an all-embracing confrontation with different cultures (Teichler, 2004), it is proposed that the three concepts are inter-related.

## **2.2 Trends of Student Mobility in International Higher Education**

Student mobility is not a new phenomenon. Yet, it has been increasingly significant in recent decades as a means of internationalising higher education (Li, 2006). Studying student mobility explores the ways in which contemporary discourses of higher education reflect and challenge the possibilities for international education around the globe. Understanding its trends and recent development is essential to gaining a deeper understanding of international education. This section is composed of four sub-sections: classification and terminology of student mobility, trends of studying abroad, development of student mobility in Mainland China, and Hong Kong's policy for the internationalisation of higher education.

### ***2.2.1 Classification and terminology of student mobility***

Student mobility is generally reflected in inflows of 'international students' into universities of different countries. However, the definitions of 'international students' are different for different data providers. Therefore it is necessary to clarify the classification and terminology of student mobility for this study in order to provide a clear background before interpreting the data sourced from various organisations.

Before 2006, the OECD's (2010) indicator of *Education at a Glance* focused on foreign students in tertiary education, defined as non-citizens of the country in which they are studying. However, this concept has been considered as

inappropriate for measuring student mobility because not all foreign students come for the sole purpose of studying, but as a result of immigration. This would result in an overestimation of the numbers of foreign students in countries. Moreover, citizens of the country who have lived abroad and return to their country of citizenship to study may also be regarded as mobile students. Therefore, the OECD, together with Eurostat and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, have improved the measurement of student mobility since 2005 by allowing countries to define the term ‘international students’ as *those who are not permanent residents of their country of study or those who received their prior education in another country (regardless of citizenship), and the term ‘foreign students’ for non-citizens enrolled in a country.*

Similarly, the Project Atlas (2010) of Student Mobility, which tracks trends of students who pursue education outside of their home countries worldwide each year, is also aware of the issue of the measurement of student mobility in terms of the concept of ‘international students’. Their data on student mobility are collected from both public and private institutions. There are limitations to what counts by public institutions may be reported differently by private institutions (Project Atlas, 2010). Hence, this project documents to the greatest extent possible the definitions used by each data source, as well as the website of the data source and the background information.

Since the available data reported from the above organisations still relies on individual countries to voluntarily provide them with data concerning ‘international students’, the data presented in such reports do not necessarily provide any more accurate information than that released by other education agencies (OBHE, 2007). Recognizing the limitations and constraints of the data availability provided by different organisations, this study does not aim to provide the most accurate or updated data, but simply to give a glimpse of the current trend of student mobility for further discussion. Therefore, I have chosen to report the data collected from Project Atlas, for the year 2008, as the basis for a general discussion.

Regarding the types of tertiary education programmes involved, the OECD distinguishes three types of upper secondary education: 'tertiary-type A' is designed to prepare students to enter university-level education; 'tertiary-type B' is vocationally-oriented tertiary education, where courses are typically shorter and focus on the development of practical, technical or occupational skills; and 'advanced research programmes'. This research concentrates on investigating the data of 'tertiary-type A' and 'advanced research programmes' in Hong Kong which are called 'undergraduate programmes' and 'postgraduate programmes' respectively in this study.

Student mobility can be generally classified by two major categories, long-term studying abroad and short-term programmes as a course component:

1. Long-term student mobility: the student undertakes the whole course abroad, the duration of which is at least from one to several years, and which might lead to formal education qualifications such as a bachelor degree, a master's degree or a post-graduate professional certificate. This kind of mobility is usually called 'studying abroad'.
2. Short-term student mobility: the student participates in a short duration, from a few weeks to one year, study abroad programme as a component of a degree awarded in their own country. This kind of mobility may be achieved within study abroad programmes such as exchanges, language immersion, overseas internships and voluntary programmes.

There are differences between 'study abroad' as a component of a degree awarded in one's own country, and 'studying abroad' to undertake whole courses abroad. Therefore, I will describe these two types of programme independently and discuss their differences in this study.

### ***2.2.2 Trends of studying abroad***

Looking into the numbers of students enrolled in other countries can provide some indication of the degree of the internationalisation of tertiary education (OECD, 2010). Project Atlas (2010) reports that the number of international tertiary level

students who have been educated outside of their home countries is rapidly increasing, from 2 million<sup>2</sup> in 2001 to 3 million<sup>1</sup> in 2008. Table 2.1 shows the comparison of Host Destinations for International Students at the Tertiary Level in 2001 and 2008.

According to the OECD (2010) report, over 75% of international and foreign students enrolled in the tertiary education of the OECD member countries in 2008 were from Asia. Asia is still the most important region in advancing international study by sending students and members of faculty abroad for advanced studies and research. For decades, students in the East who crossed international borders usually flowed to countries in the West to advance their higher education. However, significant east-to-east, or even west-to-east, flows are now occurring, and flows in all directions are growing rapidly today. The proportion of international students enrolled in the East increased significantly from 2001 to 2008 (See Table 2.1).

*Table 2.1 Comparison of host destinations for international students at the tertiary level in 2001 and 2008*

Year	2001	2008
No. of international students worldwide	2 million	3 million
Percentage of international students	%	%
US	28	21
UK	11	13
Germany	9	8
France	7	9
Australia	4	7
Japan	3	4
Spain	2	-
Belgium	2	-
China	-	6
Canada	-	4
All others	34	28
<i>Total</i>	100	100

*Source: Project Atlas Global Destinations for International Students at the Tertiary Level, 2001 and 2008*

<sup>2</sup> Estimated by Project Atlas of Student Mobility

As mentioned in Chapter 1, four types of players are classified by Observatory on Borderless Higher Education report (OBHE, 2007) in respect of the market shares for international study mobility: (1) Major Players, (2) Middle Powers, (3) Evolving Destinations and (4) Emerging Contenders. The major players, – the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, have, in the past, been the biggest importers in the international students market. However, these three countries have all recorded a decline in international student growth rate in the last few years (OBHE, 2007; OECD, 2010). This decline may be accounted for by the following reasons. The U.S. share of international students worldwide dropped from 2000 to 2008 due to its tightened immigration policy and because its image has declined in both the Muslim world and other countries since September 11, 2001 (GAO, 2009). What's more, the UK's market share is predicted to decline below 12 percent in 2015 (British Council, 2008). Meanwhile, the 'Emerging Contenders' are playing an active role to recruit international students. Project Atlas (2010) shows that the People's Republic of China has grown into a major study destination with the number of international students and scholars rising steadily over the past decade (See Table 2.1). In particular, over 60% of international students in China (South Korea: 33.0%, Japan: 9.5%, Vietnam: 5.0%, Thailand: 3.7%, India: 3.7%, Indonesia: 3.4% and Pakistan: 2.3%) were from Asia in 2008 (Project Atlas, 2010).

The number of international tertiary level students is expected to reach 8 million<sup>3</sup> by 2025 (Project Atlas, 2010). This forecast may suggest that student mobility is a prominent characteristic of internationalisation of higher education in the midst of globalisation.

### ***2.2.3 Development of student mobility in Mainland China***

In relation to China, 6% of the share (Project Atlas, 2010) of student mobility in 2008 is not a small percentage, and it is expected that the growth will reach another high in the coming years. China received more than 190,000 overseas students in 2007, almost five times the 1997 total (Wang, 28 July 2008). It regards

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<sup>3</sup> Predicted by IDP Education Australia

overseas students coming to the country as being very important, as it expects these students would help Chinese universities become more international. They came from 188 countries and regions, and 5.2% of them were offered Chinese government scholarships. This increased number is accounted for by the growing interest in China and the popularity of the Chinese language in the international community since the past decade. It also predicted that China would welcome 500,000 overseas students by 2020, including self-sponsored students (An, 20 Feb 2008).

In the initial stage of the 1980s, the development of international educational programmes was strictly controlled and regulated by the government in China (Huang, 2007). Yet, since China entered the World Trade Organisation in 2001, it has not only permitted more students from outside China to enter the Chinese education system (IIE, 2008), but is also becoming more and more market-driven in line with the liberalisation of the education sector. According to the China Scholarship Council (CSC, 2010), there were only 20,000 foreign students studying in China in 2000, but this number increased to 195,000 international students who chose to study in China in 2008.

International students attracted to study in China are largely impressed by China's economic growth in the global economy. There are, of course, other cultural and social considerations besides the rapid economic growth. China's rapid economic growth and educational change in such a short time have made it the most important target of the international education market. China now ranks as the fourth largest economy in the world. Urban incomes, especially in the east coast cities, have correspondingly increased notably. This has created a large and growing potential market for international students (British Council, 2008).

#### ***2.2.4 Hong Kong policy for the internationalisation of higher education***

Upon introducing a series of measures for the internationalisation of education, the government further extended the policy in the new HKSAR Policy Address (2009) by relaxing the relevant requirements by, for example, allowing Mainland

students to pursue studies in non-local programmes at degree level or above in Hong Kong.

Statistically, the number of non-local students in Hong Kong reached 9,200 in the 2008-09 school year, representing a 16% rise over the previous year (HKSAR Policy Address, 2009). The tuition fees and living costs for studying in Hong Kong are about \$HK100,000 to 130,000 per year, which is half of the cost of studying in Singapore. Accepting more non-local students can not only develop the education industry, but can also enhance the cosmopolitan image of Hong Kong.

As for direction, the University Grants Committee (UGC, 2009b) of Hong Kong further stresses that Hong Kong must have its own strong higher education system, as its future depends upon harnessing knowledge and understanding to define the cultural vision, and create and respond to economic opportunities. The UGC reported that 90% of Mainland students who were admitted to Hong Kong higher education institutions were top students, and believes that they could help Hong Kong local students stimulate their thinking and develop new value perspectives for quality learning. The UGC also promises to take a proactive role in strategic planning and policy development to advise and steer the higher education sector in satisfying the diverse needs of stakeholders in order to assist institutions to perform at an internationally competitive level in their respective roles. The University Grants Committee (UGC, 2009b: 1) declares that it

- a. sees the Hong Kong higher education sector serving as "the education hub of the region" driving forward the economic and social development of Hong Kong, in the context of our unique relationship with Mainland China and the region;
- b. takes a strategic approach to Hong Kong's higher education system, by developing an interlocking system where the whole higher education sector is viewed as one force, with each institution fulfilling a unique role, based on its strengths;

- c. works with institutions to ensure that each provides excellent teaching in all areas relevant to its role;
- d. aims to promote "international competitiveness" where it occurs in institutions, understanding that all will contribute to this endeavour and that some institutions will have more internationally competitive centres than others; and
- e. values a role-driven yet deeply collaborative system of higher education where each institution has its own role and purpose, while at the same time being committed to extensive collaboration with other institutions in order that the system can sustain a greater variety of offerings at a high level of quality and with improving efficiency.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

This chapter reveals the complexities of emerging discourses of university in a notion of a globalised economy by discussing the issues of internationalisation of higher education and globalisation, and particularly student mobility. In an increasingly growing global society, there is an emerging view that a global perspective is important to be able to participate in and understand our place in such a world.

The growing number of higher education opportunities for both studying abroad and at home has increased competition in the international student market (OBHE, 2007). Specific figures of international student flows can help universities reconsider their competitiveness, educational quality, and provision of up-to-date facilities and technological infrastructures. However, one needs to be cautious of the available statistics provided by different data providers and different host nations, as they may have different definitions of 'international student' and 'international education'. Generally, student mobility can be classified into two major categories, 'study abroad' as a component of a degree awarded in a country and studying abroad to undertake whole courses abroad, and there is a difference



between these two types of mobility. By examining the trends and figures of student mobility in general, it reflects the current student flow around the globe.

In Hong Kong, the government has been encouraging higher education institutions to put effort into internationalisation so as to develop Hong Kong as an educational hub in the Asia-Pacific region. In this study, I pay detailed attention to the student mobility of Hong Kong students who provide pertinent data for the examination of the influences of student abroad programmes on attaining a global perspective. The next chapter will further explore study abroad programmes worldwide by reflecting those trends and figures of different regions, the perceived value of student mobility and issues facing students in deciding to study abroad, as well as the discourse of attaining a global perspective through study abroad programmes.

# **CHAPTER THREE**

## **STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMMES: TRENDS AND PERCEIVED VALUE**

### **3.0 Introduction**

In Chapter 2, I suggested that student mobility should be understood as part of an emerging set of discourses on universities in the global economy. As I have outlined in the previous chapters, there is a difference between student mobility in terms of undertaking whole courses abroad and ‘study abroad’ as a component of a degree awarded in one’s own country. In fact, there is an abundance of studies on long-term student mobility and short-term study abroad programmes for individual programmes and purposes, as well as student and faculty perspectives about the influence of a study abroad experience on a small-scale sample of participants. A review of the literature, however, reveals a lack of larger-scale and well-designed research that attempts to measure student perspectives of short-term study abroad participation particularly in the Hong Kong context.

In this chapter, I develop a more extended overview of contemporary short-term study abroad programmes in different regions of the world and the flows of students for study abroad programmes are outlined. The significance of student mobility in higher education is also addressed by examining the perceived value of student mobility and issues facing students in deciding to study abroad. Then, it extends the discourse of attaining a global perspective through study abroad programmes. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by framing the research questions of this study.

### **3.1 Brief History of Contemporary Short-term Study Abroad Programmes**

As studying abroad is becoming popular, and participating in short-term study abroad programmes as an alternative form of student mobility is increasingly popular in higher education curricula, in this section I outline an overview of some popular exchange programmes in Western-oriented regions such as Europe, the United States and Australia, as well as in the Asia region, including Japan and Singapore. I will then focus on the issue of student mobility in the China region so that an overview of a general trend of short-term student mobility in Mainland China and Hong Kong can be presented.

#### ***3.1.1 Exchange programmes in Western-oriented regions: Europe, the United States and Australia***

In Europe, reforms have been under way for some time to increase the attractiveness of higher education in European countries for students from outside Europe, as well as in order to facilitate intra-European student mobility (Rivza & Teichler, 2007). Under this reform, the ERASMUS programme, of which the duration is usually between one and two semesters, was first established in 1987 (Teichler & Janson, 2007). The annual budget is in excess of €400 million (European Commission, 2010). Individual cooperating higher education institutions or departments are free to set specific targets, as long as they take care to facilitate the life and study of the mobile students and take measures to ensure recognition upon return of the study achievements abroad (Rivza & Teichler, 2007). Since then, more than 4,000 higher education institutions in 33 countries have taken part in ERASMUS, and more than 2.2 million students have participated in the programme since it started in 1987 (European Commission, 2010). The number of students participation increasing annually from about 30,000 in 1990 to over 150,000 in 2006 (Teichler & Janson, 2007). The annual budget is in excess of €400 million (European Commission, 2010).

These policies were influenced by the U.S. 'junior year abroad' programme or similar schemes which sent students abroad, but differed in that they placed an emphasis on cooperation between departments (Teichler & Janson, 2007). The European Union decided to extend its support for student mobility. This programme expanded to cover new areas such as student placements in enterprises, university staff training and teaching for enterprise staff. As a sub-programme, ERASMUS became part of the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme from late 2007 onwards in place of SOCRATES (from 1995 to 2007). Furthermore, the European Parliament and Council further approved the Erasmus Mundus programme in 2003. Erasmus Mundus emphasizes cooperation with third-world countries and allows students from those countries to study in Europe. Under this program, students from third-world nations will receive up to 5,000 scholarships annually, and European Union graduate students can compete for 4,000 scholarships for study in third-world countries (Kritz, 2006). The programme seeks to expand its mobility even further in coming years, with the target of 3 million Erasmus students by 2012.

FULBRIGHT programme is the largest international exchange programme in U.S. and has been established for a long time since 1946. It awarded approximately 6,000 grants in 2007, at a cost of \$262 million, to U.S. students, teachers, professionals and scholars for activities in more than 155 countries, and to their foreign counterparts to engage in similar activities in the United States (IIE, 2009).

The Australian Endeavour Awards not only provide opportunities for Australians to undertake study, research and professional development abroad, but also for Asia-Pacific and Middle Eastern citizens to do the same in Australia (Endeavour Awards, 2010). A smaller number of awards are also available for participants from Europe and the Americas. It is part of the Australian Scholarship that promotes excellence in education. In 2008, 963 students were subsidised and 1,068 students were expected to be subsidised in 2009. Student exchange in Australia is a way of building linkages between Australia and foreign nations, providing a contemporary understanding of the country which in turn forms the

basis of business and cultural relationships. Therefore, student mobility is also expected to serve the purpose of increasing intercultural knowledge and enhancing the level of international cooperation (Rizvi & Lingard 2010:169).

*Table 3.1 A summary of comparison among short-term study abroad programmes in Western-oriented region*

Region/ Country	Programme	Origin of Target students	Objectives
United States	FULBRIGHT (established in 1946)	All	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase mutual understanding between the peoples of the United States and other countries through the exchange of persons, knowledge, and skills.</li> </ul>
Europe	ERASMUS (established in 1987)  SOCRATES (from 1995 to 2007)  EU's Lifelong Learning Programme (from late 2007 onwards)	Intra-European student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Enable students to benefit educationally, linguistically and culturally from the experience of learning in other European countries;</li> <li>- Promote co-operation between institutions and to enrich the educational environment of host institutions;</li> <li>- Contribute to the development of a pool of well-qualified, open-minded and internationally experienced young people as future professionals</li> <li>- Facilitate credit transfer and recognition of periods abroad, utilizing a compatible credit system</li> </ul>
	Erasmus Mundus (established in 2003)	third-world countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Allow students from those countries to study in Europe</li> </ul>
Australia	Endeavour Awards (established in 1993)	Asia-Pacific,  Middle East regions  Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Deepen Australia's global engagement in education and research</li> <li>- Reinforce Australia's reputation as a high quality education provider and leader in research, innovation and knowledge management</li> <li>- Enhance language skills and cultural understanding of Australia;</li> <li>- Provide opportunities for Australian professionals to enhance their skills and knowledge.</li> </ul>

These three large-scale short-term study abroad programmes illustrate that different programmes have different objectives as mentioned in Chapter 1 (refer to

section 1.1.3) and that different cultural groups may or may not pursue mobility for different reasons. A summary of comparison among these short-term study abroad programmes in Western-oriented regions is shown in Table 3.1.

### ***3.1.2 Exchange programmes in the Asian region: Japan and Singapore***

In Asia, I would like to choose two developed countries, Japan and Singapore, for illustration. Since 1987, the Japanese have developed the national Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme to promote internationalisation. It aims at increasing mutual understanding between Japanese and people of other nations. It sends participants from other countries to work in public schools and government offices throughout Japan to improve their foreign language skills and to enhance international exchange in Japan's communities (JET, 2010). This programme has accumulated approximately 41,000 JET alumni who have stayed in Japan for a period of one year up to a maximum of 5 years. In Singapore, the government has not established exchange student programmes nationally. These programmes are dependent on the promotion of individual institutions. For example, the exchange programme of the National University of Singapore (NSU) is offered by its International Relations Office which was established in 1997. Nevertheless, the NSU is sending more than 1,000 undergraduate exchange students each year to study a semester or two at an overseas partner University for learning a foreign language and new cultures as well as earning credits towards their NSU degree (NSU, 2010). Although both Japan and Singapore are regarded as developed Asian countries, their approaches towards exchange programmes are varied in that Japan takes a national approach while Singapore tends to take an institutional approach to promoting those programmes.

### ***3.1.3 Study abroad programmes in Mainland China and Hong Kong***

Affiliated with the Ministry of Education in the People's Republic of China, the China Scholarship Council (CSC) is financed mainly by the state's special appropriations for scholarship programmes. This financial assistance is provided for the Chinese citizens to study abroad, and for the citizens of other nations to do

the same to strengthen the friendship and understanding between Chinese people and the people of all other countries. However, this organization's website does not show the number of those exchange students in Mainland Chinese.

In Hong Kong, only one government policy addresses exchange programmes (HKSAR, 2008). However, this policy only aims to promote national education by facilitating secondary school students to join exchange programmes or study trips in Mainland China. Similar to Singapore, the aims and the promotion of a variety of exchange student programmes in Hong Kong higher education are largely dependent on individual institutions, faculties and departments. Nonetheless, the HKSAR government also encourages the higher education institutions to step up exchange and promotion in Asia. The logic is that the HKSAR government believes that an increasing number of non-local students will provide a more international environment for local students to broaden their horizons.

### **3.2 Perceived Value and Issues for Deciding to Study Abroad**

This study is designed to provide a better understanding of the Chinese students' perspectives on study abroad programmes. Major perspectives include the perceived value and issues influencing student decision-making to study abroad. This section examines the literature on the perceived value and issues influencing student decision-making, and how they subsequently affect their choice to study abroad. The perceived value and issues are entwined together in the process of decision making. The range of issues of study abroad programmes can be aggregated into six key areas: academic and professional value; understanding foreign culture and social and personal development; language skills; impact on employment; financial, institutional factors and social background; as well as security issues.

### ***3.2.1 Academic and professional value***

Research shows that the academic and professional value, such as academic resources, the depth of knowledge and experience they acquire in their classes, and the professional connections that they make to enhance their career opportunities, are consistently regarded as one of the most important factors that students would consider with regards to studying abroad (Dolby, 2005; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). The majority of Mainland Chinese studying abroad are particularly concerned with the academic and professional value of education (Huang, 2007). However, it should be noted that academic satisfaction is found to be strongly related to contact with the local students, to the acquisition of language skills, and to levels of perceived discrimination (Perrucci & Hu, 1995). Not only do the students find that studying abroad is academically advantageous, but those studying abroad would also put more effort into their studies and believe that academic progress abroad is greater when abroad than during a corresponding period at home (Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). Another example is illustrated in Stofflett and Stoddart's (1994) study. It found that the introduction of new practices could help students to associate with new ways of educational thinking and, on the basis of the examples experienced, make them better able to shape their own practices accordingly.

For short-term study abroad programmes, research by Teichler and Janson (2007) found that both the majority of former ERASMUS students and employers believed that internationally-experienced students are likely to be superior in many of the professionally-relevant competences than formerly non-mobile students. This is particularly the case for those from the Central and Eastern European countries, where study experience in another European country is still a more exclusive experience that ensures a higher professional reward (Teichler & Janson, 2007).



### ***3.2.2 Understanding foreign culture, social and personal development***

Countries create face-to-face exchange opportunities with foreign students and educators to provide a better understanding of a nation's views, values, and culture through advancing international education by promoting exchange programmes (GAO, 2009). The goals of international education in the European Union (EU) are to promote intercultural understanding through cooperation with non-European countries as well as to ensure that education and training are accessible to the global community. Wiers-Jenssen (2003) showed that students put even more emphasis on the positive aspects of personal development of studying abroad than on academic aspects such as linguistic and cultural skills.

Students are also convinced that temporary study in another country is helpful in getting to know the other societies and cultures, as well as getting along with persons from different cultural backgrounds. The majority of former ERASMUS students believe that their knowledge of understanding of foreign cultures and societies in general is important (Teichler & Janson, 2007). Learning academically and culturally from short-term study in other countries is believed to be the best for "horizontal" mobility, that is, if the quality of study programmes and level of competences between the students of the home and host country are similar (Rivza & Teichler, 2007).

### ***3.2.3 Language skills***

Universities often enhance the international content of their programmes and encourage students to learn foreign languages, to participate in and to pursue study programmes that include international curricula in order to equip themselves for working in the global economy (Kritz, 2006). Learning English is one of the main reasons for Asian students to consider studying abroad in an English-speaking country (Chen, 2007; Huang, 2007; Park, 2009). Regardless of the language barriers, different methods of learning and changed living conditions, the majority of students highly value improving their language skills and

becoming acquainted with host nationals (Oppen *et al.*, 1990; Teichler, 1996; European Commission, 1999). Nonetheless, language still remains both an important benefit as well as a critical issue for students in deciding to study abroad. Teichler and Janson's (2007) study shows that mobile students feel three times as strongly in their foreign language proficiency than non-mobile students.

Tremblay (2003) suggests that students' choice of going to a country with a language other than their mother tongue is shaped by motives that are economic in nature; that is, it is linked to exploiting language skills on the labour market. For example, although Norwegians' knowledge of the English language tends to be reasonably good since they start studying English in school from the age of six, they also find it advantageous to improve their skills by studying in English-speaking countries (Wiers-Jenssen, 2003).

Although foreign languages may be a major barrier, both in terms of the language deficiencies of the students who study abroad and the shortage of courses offered in English in countries where English is not the primary language, this gap is being bridged as an increasing number of institutions are now offering courses taught in English, in a wide range of academic fields, while other research (IIE, 2007) has shown that more international students are studying foreign languages.

### ***3.2.4 Impact on employment***

Studying abroad is considered to have a positive impact on subsequent employment and work opportunities. Students view the study abroad period as leading to international mobility, strengthening global competences, and probably enhancing international job opportunities. Students who have studied abroad are believed to be more open to other cultures and have widened horizons, so they would be more favored by employers, especially those involved in international trade. Surveyed employers reflect that they often believe that internationally experienced students contribute to general career enhancement (Teichler & Janson, 2007; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). Working with people of different cultures and

communicating in foreign languages are as important as academic knowledge and personality in playing important roles in the employer's recruitment.

Mainland China has been through great reform since the opening-up policy of 1978. Since then, overseas study has meant better job opportunities and greater contribution because people with an international education background are urgently needed (An, 20 Feb 2008). Besides, students would more likely consider planning an international career after they have studied abroad (Dolby, 2005; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). However, a Swedish study on employers' preferences indicated that employers prefer to hire people who are partly trained abroad, rather than those who have had their entire education abroad (Zadeh, 1999 *cited in* Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). Whether it is always favourable to be trained abroad could be questioned, particularly for short-term study abroad participants.

### ***3.2.5 Financial, institutional factors and social background***

Students are largely financially sensitive to the costs that might be involved in studying. Chinese students and parents appear to seek value for money and are price sensitive across a competitor set of countries: the UK, the USA, Australia, Canada, Japan, Germany, France and New Zealand (British Council, 2008; Chen, 2007). Hence, Australia has started an 'Australia scholarships' programme to strengthen education ties in the Asia Pacific region. As a result, the number of scholarships for students from the region doubled from the previous year (China Daily, 17th Jan 2008). Although some European countries have started charging or increasing overseas students' fee, the fees are still considered to be affordable and lower compared to those of the U.S. and the UK. Considering value for money, Chinese may choose some host countries, such as the Scandinavian countries or Germany, because the tuition fees are lower, or alternatively countries which allow students to work part-time, such as France, Germany and Australia. It is believed that with more scholarships available, the extension of work plans after graduation and the easing of restrictions on part-time work, the prospects of studying in that host country would be brighter (China Daily, 17th Jan 2008). Since financial constraints are a crucial concern for students deciding to study

abroad for a degree, participating in short-term study abroad may provide an alternative for students to benefit from a shorter period of international study experience.

There is a trend documented in European studies showing that a relatively high proportion of students who study abroad have parents who had studied abroad previously (Oppen *et al.*, 1990). Recommendations from family or friends who have formerly studied abroad appear to be fairly significant to students (Waters, 2005; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003). Students tend to aggregate in certain countries and institutions as a result of the former student networks that operate through institutional channels, in turn reducing the uncertainty involved in mobility, and thus facilitate the decision to go abroad (Tremblay, 2003). A key concern for this study whether this is also the case for short-term study abroad.

### **3.2.6 Security issues**

Security and immigration policies are factors for students to consider when planning to study abroad. For example, data collected by the Institute of International Education (IIE, 2007) revealed that one major reason why the U.S. experienced a decline in international students can be accounted for by the 9/11 events of 2001. This induced uncertainty about the U.S. as a destination, and the imposition of visa restrictions which affected ease of mobility as a direct result. The GAO (2009) report also shows that the United States' image has declined in both the Muslim world and other countries since the September 11 events. In general, the U.S. share of international students worldwide dropped between 2000 and 2008 due to its tightened immigration policy.

## **3.3 Attaining a Global Perspective through Study Abroad Programmes**

Study abroad programmes are no longer just a means of facilitating cultural exchange and creating increased understanding among people from different

countries. Rather they have become essential in preparing students to work in a global complex context in which the number of transnational organisations is increasing. The Institute of International Education of America (IIE, 2009) emphasizes that, “Peace and prosperity around the world depend on increasing the capacity of people to think and work on a global and intercultural basis. As technology opens borders, educational and professional exchange opens minds. ” The aims of the Fulbright Program, which is sponsored by the United States Department of State, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, and which provides funding for students, scholars, teachers, and professionals to undertake graduate study, advanced research, university teaching, and teaching in elementary and secondary schools, are to “increase mutual understanding between the peoples of the United States and other countries, through the exchange of persons, knowledge and skills” (IIE, 2009). It is evident that the US government is aiming to increase the global competence of students through participating in study abroad programmes.

Study abroad programmes are widely offered around the globe and have developed into a major industry within higher education. They are shown to be effective in enhancing students’ global awareness and competence in higher education institutes (Douglas & Jones-Rikkens, 2001; Sutton & Rubin, 2004). Mapp and her colleagues’ (2007) research findings also show that learning about the political situation and history of the study abroad country helped to improve their global understanding.

The Vice President of the Hong Kong Institute of Education, a higher education institute in Hong Kong, also stressed that<sup>4</sup>:

*‘As a global perspective is becoming more and more relevant, our professors need to be broad-minded and have multidisciplinary knowledge. Being confined to traditional education methodologies is no longer enough.’*

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<sup>4</sup> Classified Post, P25 2; South China Morning Post on 29 Nov 2008

The website of this institute also declares that one of its developments is to include expanding a "global perspective" by recruiting more international students locally and through exchange programmes, and hiring more academic staff from other countries. It indicates that not only is attaining a global perspective seen as more and more important, but that study abroad programmes, such as student exchange programmes, are believed to be a crucial way to achieve that goal.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

Study abroad programmes can be generally classified as long-term studying abroad and short-term programmes as a course component. In this chapter, I have examined student mobility in terms of contemporary short-term study abroad programmes in different regions of the world, though with a particular focus on Europe, the United States, Australia, Japan, and Singapore. These short-term study abroad programmes illustrate that different programmes have different objectives and that different cultural groups may or may not pursue mobility for different reasons. These countries and regions provide useful knowledges on study abroad, and studying abroad, which are then helpful for the focus of this research; China and Hong Kong.

I have addressed the significance of student mobility in higher education by examining the perceived value of student mobility from existing programmes in general. Several factors influence student decision-making and how they affect their choice of studying abroad are subsequently discussed. First, the perceived value and issues for deciding to study abroad include the academic and professional value; understanding foreign culture, social and personal development; language skills; impact on employment; financial, institutional factors and social background; as well as security issues. The academic and professional value is often regarded as the most important factor for students considering to study abroad. Language skills are perceived as both a benefit and a barrier, while the impact of subsequent employment is also hoped for after being abroad to study. Other issues, such as financial, institutional factors, social

background, security and immigration policies, participants' aims for understanding foreign culture, and social and personal development, are all, also, crucial factors for students to decide whether and where they would like to study abroad. Second, attaining a global perspective through study abroad programmes is believed to benefit one's development in terms of competing in the global economy, and becoming a global citizen who promotes global economic equality and is involved in political issues concerning other countries. Study abroad programmes are seen as one of the means which is designed to achieve the expectations of attaining a global perspective. In the midst of globalisation, international students situated in the mobility of higher education in other countries may gain a better position to attain a different global perspective than those without such privilege of mobility through short-term study abroad programmes. One way to obtain a global perspective could be accomplished by participating in a variety of study abroad programmes offered through higher education institutions.

Although conventional wisdom in the study abroad field has believed that the longer students study abroad, the more significant the academic and cultural development and personal growth benefits (Dwyer & Peters, 2004), I am particularly interested in Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students and their participation in studying abroad programmes organised by Hong Kong higher education institutions, and whether, and in what ways, there are differences between these two groups? Hence, a comparative study between Hong Kong students and Mainland Chinese students was conducted.

The concepts, categories and conceptual frameworks of student mobility in the emerging discourses of university in the globalised economy in the context of globalisation are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. The literature review of these two chapters serves as the formative framework of this study. In particular, I would like to seek answers to the three research questions of this study: (1) what are the students' perceived value and the impacts of study abroad programmes in higher education? (2) what are the issues students face in deciding whether they would participate in study abroad programmes? and (3) what are the students' views on

attaining a global perspective through study abroad programmes? These questions will be further tested and explained by conducting this study. The methodology of this research study will be explained in the next chapter.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

As set out in previous chapters, the purpose of this study is to broaden the understandings of ‘study abroad’ student mobility in the context of Hong Kong higher education. It also compares the perceptions and the experiences of different groups of students studying in Hong Kong for a wider spectrum of understandings of the ‘short-term study abroad’ programmes in the higher education curriculum. In respect of these objectives, I adopted a ‘mixed’ methodology by which the research questions posed in Chapter 1 were answered: (1) the students’ perceived values and the impacts of study abroad programmes in higher education; (2) the issues students face in deciding whether they would participate in study abroad programmes; and (3) the students’ views on attaining a global perspective through study abroad programmes (refer to Chapter 1).

This chapter delineates the ‘mixed’ methodology of this study comprised of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The purposes of adopting this methodology were to draw multi-level investigations into study abroad programmes in the context of Hong Kong higher education. For the quantitative method, I deployed a student survey with a questionnaire for a general understanding of study abroad programmes. For the qualitative approach, I interviewed different groups of students and collected institutional documents relevant to the students’ experiences in those programmes. This chapter further covers the ways in which I did data sampling, data collection and data analysis, and how the issues of reliability and validity were attended to. The ethical issues

and limitations of this study are also discussed. Finally, this chapter concludes with the benefits of using this methodology and points to the analysis and findings in subsequent chapters about the new look of study abroad programmes.

## **4.1 Study Design**

Quantitative and qualitative research approaches come from two different philosophical and ontological bases, having different views of reality and therefore hold different views of the phenomena under study. Quantitative research is usually informed by positivism, tends to be theory-based from the onset, and is more closely associated with scientific methods than is qualitative research. Its ontological position is that there is only one truth with an objective reality that exists independent of human perception (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Qualitative research is usually informed by interpretivism and constructivism. The purpose of interpretivist research is to describe and interpret the phenomena of the world in an attempt to get shared meaning with others, and to search for deep perspectives on particular events and for theoretical insights (Bassey, 1990). Its ontological position suggests that there are multiple realities or truths based on one's construction of reality (Berger & Luckmann, 1967). These different underlying philosophical and ontological assumptions mean that, usually, quantitative and qualitative approaches do not study the same phenomena (Sale et al., 2002). However, they can be combined for complementary purposes to enrich our understanding. Since the nature of this research is an emphasis on the perceptions and the experience of the respondents, I incline to take an interpretive epistemology as a way of understanding different constructions of meaning and social interaction (Berger & Luckmann, 1967) through the participants' experience. As interpretivism is characterized by a concern for the individual, I began with individuals and set out to understand their interpretations of the world around them (Cohen and Manion, 1994). As it is important to take account of cultural and individual differences in forming the basis of different mobility experiences, I began with a qualitative approach adopting interviews to understand the students' experiences of studying abroad and their interpretations

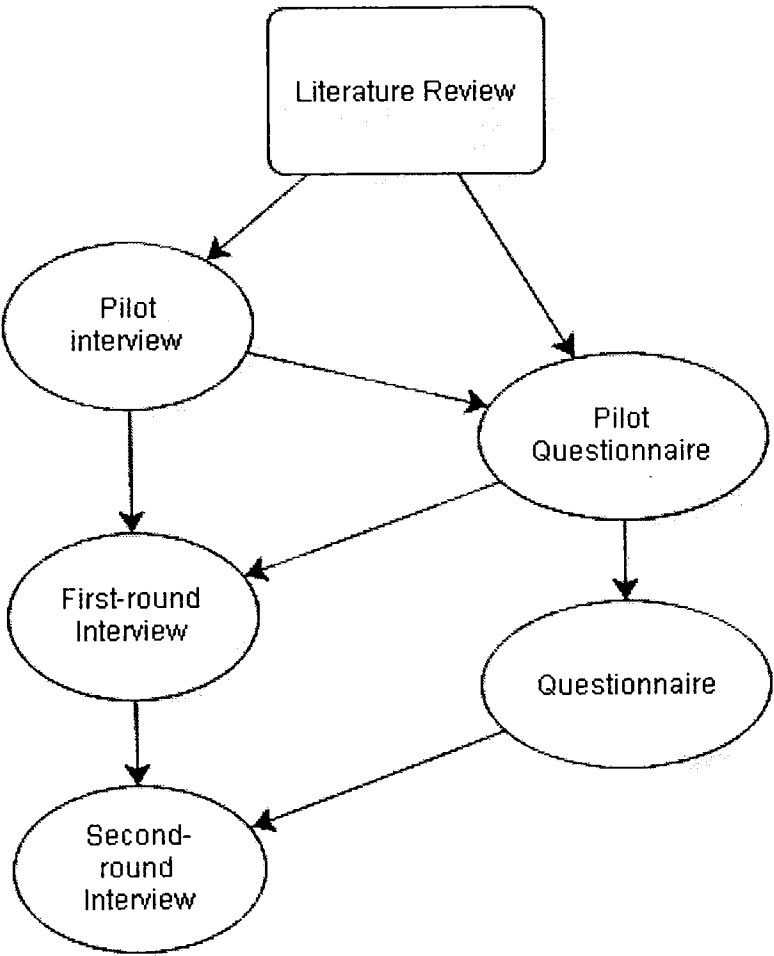
of the current short-term study abroad programmes in higher education. However, as these experiences are complex and dynamic requiring data from a larger number of perspectives (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie 2004), I also chose to use quantitative methods in order to be able to answer my research questions more fully. Although interpretivism is usually associated with qualitative research – and my study is mainly qualitative - this ‘should not prevent a qualitative researcher from utilizing data collection methods more typically associated with quantitative research’ (ibid 2004: 15). In addition, the logic of justification, which is an important aspect of epistemology, does not limit what specific data collection and data analytical methods researchers must use (ibid 2004).

To understand the complexities of social phenomena, it is necessary to adopt mixed methods. To achieve the objectives for the study, this research therefore adopts both quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative method help determine relationships, effects and causes in a macro sense, whereas qualitative methods are used to gain an understanding of social phenomena in a micro sense. Macro-social trends provide a starting point for formulating the research problems, whilst micro-social processes solve the empirical puzzles of the problems raised (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002).

I used both a questionnaire survey and interviews to conduct this research. On the one hand, I aimed to examine the relationship between students’ perceived values, impacts, issues facing students in deciding to study abroad, and views of attaining global perspectives through the questionnaires. On the other hand, I searched for an in-depth understanding of the social phenomena of students’ views concerning the corresponding questions in the interviews. With the larger sample size of the questionnaire survey, its findings could be seen as offering a macro-view, or an overall picture, of the students’ perceived values, as well as variations across nationality, gender, programme and the length of the study abroad programme in which they participated. The student interview findings could be seen as a microscopic view of the survey results, and are complementary to the survey findings in the sense that the students’ views at a deeper level can be grasped from the interviews. The study abroad experiences could be examined in the interviews

so as to offer additional perspectives on making sense of the wide spectrum of findings. For instance, the interview findings not only told us about their experiences, but also informed us how these experiences influenced the students and the reasons behind their views.

This study included two rounds of interviews and one round of administering the questionnaire. Its design was developed through having the different phases of data and findings interact with each other. Pilot interviews designed as part of the prior research (Maxwell, 2005) not only tested out the methods but also helped identify some items for designing the questionnaire. The preliminary results of the pilot questionnaire were used to refine the interview questions. The development of the study design model is shown in Figure 4.1.



*Figure 4.1 The development of the study design model*

Firstly, I designed a pilot interview based on the literature. Secondly, I constructed the pilot questionnaire from both the literature and the preliminary results of the pilot interviews. Thirdly, I refined the first-round interview questions after the pilot interview and the initial results from the pilot questionnaire. Meanwhile, I fine-tuned the questionnaire according to the results of the pilot questionnaire. Fourthly, I developed the second-round interview questions after I analysed both the first-round interviews and the questionnaire findings.

This research design is targeted at directly answering the first two research questions posed in Chapter 1: (1) what are the students' perceived values and impacts of the study abroad programme in higher education? (2) what are the issues students face in deciding whether they will participate in a study abroad programme. Regarding research question (3), what are the students' views on attaining a global perspective through study abroad programmes? it needed to be further addressed through the collection of empirical data from the following sub-questions:

- (i) What are the students' understandings of 'global perspective' by participating in those programmes in the context of globalisation?
- (ii) How do they value global perspective through their views of globalisation?
- (iii) Do they think that attaining a global perspective is important to their personal, cultural and social development, and in what ways?
- (iv) Have they changed their perceived values of studying abroad after returning from the study?

Then, I used both the questionnaire and interview results to compare the responses of the two groups of participants: (1) Study abroad and non study abroad students; and (2) the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students.

#### ***4.1.1 Questionnaire***

One reason I chose the questionnaire survey was because it was less time-consuming and more cost-effective than other approaches. Each

questionnaire was completed in around 15 minutes. It was relatively short compared with the interview, as I aimed to reduce the risk of ‘respondent fatigue’ when participating in the research (Bryman, 2001).

The questionnaire was administered to undergraduate and postgraduate students. It aimed to obtain the factual information and the attitudinal information of a larger number of respondents. The questions were developed from the concepts and categories identified in the literature review, and were designed according to the pilot interview results that aimed to refer to the specific context of this research. This version of the questionnaire was composed of four parts with sixty-eight questions. Three items (questions A16, D16 and D21) were negatively worded to avoid responders’ acquiescence or affirmation bias. In order to examine if there were any differences between the study abroad participants’ perceived values and the influences of those study abroad programmes, the items of questions A1 to A17 and questions D1 to D17 were written to identically correspond. This design could not examine if there were any differences between each individual’s expectations and experiences, but it could serve as triangulation for each individual’s responses. Details of the question construction are given in Table 4.1.

*Table 4.1 Details of the construction of the questions*

Part	Description	Aims	Number of questions
A	Perceived values of studying abroad	to capture the views on the perceived value of study abroad programmes	20
B	Importance of attaining a global perspective	to capture the views on the value of attaining a global perspective	11
C	Considerations for studying abroad	to examine the considerations and preference for participating in studying abroad programmes	10
D	Influences of studying abroad	to investigate the perceived influences of participating in studying abroad programmes on the participants	27
		<b>Total</b>	<b>68</b>

The questions were in the format of a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5 (where 1 indicates strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 undecided or neutral, 4 agree, and 5 strongly agree). The higher the score, the stronger the tendency for the participant to agree with the idea expressed in that particular statement in the questionnaire. In addition, three open-ended questions were also constructed in Part D to capture the respondent's perceptions of the best and the most difficult parts of the programmes they participated in, as well as the reasons for their recommendations for such study abroad programmes. The demographic data collected in the questionnaire included the respondents' nationality, gender, age range, the type of programme, the respondent's institution and year, and the duration, location(s) and type(s) of study abroad programme(s) for those who participated. The questionnaire also asked the participants to rank their preference of host country if they had a chance to participate in a study abroad programme, where '1' is the most preferred country, '2' is the second most preferred, and so forth (up to '9'). For the study abroad participants, they were asked to write down the host country(s) and the duration of the programme(s) that they had participated in. Through the questionnaire, the differences between different groups of students could be investigated among the independent variables of the demographic data. The questionnaire survey is attached as Appendix I.

#### ***4.1.2 Interview***

The goal of qualitative research is to understand the issues under investigation from the participant's perspective (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Interviews are generally regarded as a useful device to provide important information, not only about what is happening in the context, but also about those thoughts and feelings as part of the event (Nixon, 1992). Although interviews are more time-consuming and costly than other methods of data collection, and can usually only be applied to a few cases, settings or people, this more in-depth approach may find 'things that no one has ever noticed before' (Seale, 2004: 76). To explore in greater depth the understanding of students' perceived values, the influences and those attributed factors of the study abroad programmes, two rounds of semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews aim to 'allow the

interviewees to express themselves at length, but offer enough shape to prevent aimless rambling' (Wragg 2002:149). The cost of interviewing mainly involves transcribing the interviews. In order to develop a broader picture of any change of views, I sought students' reflections upon their study abroad experiences after the completion of their study abroad programmes.

Parallel to the questionnaires, a first-round of interview questions was designed to investigate the perceived values, considerations and influences of the study abroad programme, as well as their perceptions of globalisation and of what a global perspective might be. The questions were constructed as the following three parts.

I. Questions about the participants' study abroad experiences

1. *Which host country and which type of study abroad programme did they join? What were the considerations which influenced them to join and choose that programme?*
2. *Did the experience(s) match their goals and expectations?*
3. *What were the challenges and how did they adapt to the environment in terms of language, academic and social aspects?*
4. *What kinds of impacts did the study abroad experience have on them?*

II. Questions about their perceived value of the study abroad programme

1. *What are their perceived benefits of study abroad programmes?*
2. *What are their perceived drawbacks of study abroad programmes?*
3. *Is there any difference between their perceived values and influences of the study abroad programmes?*

III. Questions about globalisation and global perspective

1. *What are their perceptions of global perspective and its impact on them?*
2. *What do they understand by globalisation?*
3. *What do they think of the role of study abroad programmes in globalisation?*



The questions in the first part, about the participants' study abroad experiences, were designed to examine their considerations in deciding to study abroad, their expectations, the impacts of the study on them, and the challenges they faced whilst participating in those programmes. The questions in the second part of the study, about their perceived values of study abroad programmes, were intended to collect their views on the perceived values, and both the benefits and drawbacks of study abroad programmes. They aimed to investigate whether or not there was any gap between their expectations and the actual influences of the study abroad programme they had participated in. The questions in the third part on globalisation and the global perspective were undertaken at two levels: to elicit their own understanding of the term 'globalisation' and to provide a floor for them to express their expectations and the roles of study abroad programmes in the process of globalisation.

I conducted the second-round of interviews approximately three months after conducting the first-round. The aim of conducting this second-round of interviews was to seek explanations after I had tentatively analysed the findings from the questionnaire results and the first-round interviews. It also served as a kind of triangulation in the research. Each interview was conducted over about 45 minutes, was audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were also made during the interviews for double recording and verification from the interviewees if necessary. These actions could both record deeper insights into the interaction and allow it to be seen a number of times before drawing conclusions (Kumar 1996:107-8).

The development of coding categories involved an iterative process by considering the relevant literature and exploring the interview data. Firstly, the transcriptions and field notes were coded by a tentatively predefined set of codes that were informed by the conceptual framework as well as new categories found in the data. Secondly, each initial code was further categorised by sub-themes. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the data collected in this research were the participants' self-reports. Since people perceive and so construe the world in ways which are often similar but not necessarily the same, there can be different

interpretations of what is real, as human actions are based on social meanings, such as beliefs and intentions (Bassey, 1990). I am cautious that the significant claims and the chosen themes were based on my own perceptions to portray and understand the constructions of the informants.

#### ***4.1.3 Documentation***

Policy content analysis and documentary evidence were also included in the analysis to enrich the findings and literature review. Documentary evidence was involved in order to further examine the relevant topic, and gave some insights into the socio-political contexts with which the institutions interacted (Bush, 2002). The document data were obtained from two sources: searching the official government, organisations, institutional and newspaper websites; or provided by gatekeepers who had access to that information from different institutions. This documentary analysis and statistical description provided a wider perspective for viewing the issues through multiple analyses at the global, national, local and institutional levels. These data were also helpful in pursuing the latest policy and practice information.

#### ***4.1.4 Data sampling and collection***

This section discusses the data sampling and the processes of data collection of this research study. Convenience sampling for the students was adopted for both the survey and interview methods. The choice of my study site was because of its appropriateness for the chosen topic and also my availability to collect the data.

Regarding the quantitative portion, a questionnaire survey was administered in paper-and-pencil format. Face-to-face, telephone and email invitations were presented by my colleagues and myself. Each questionnaire, along with a stamped envelope, was distributed to those who agreed to take part in this survey. Then, the participant could seal the completed questionnaire in the given envelop with their signature and post it to me directly. This could ensure that all questionnaires were anonymous and thus ensure their confidentiality. Follow-up calls were made and

reminders were sent to the invited participants in order to achieve a higher response rate. All respondents were fully informed about the purposes, instructions of the research, and the assurance of confidentiality through both verbal explanations before they answered the questionnaires as well as a written form on the cover page of the questionnaires. In order to improve the response rate of the survey and participation in the interviews, I emphasised the importance of their contributions in this research. Quantitative data were collected across eight Hong Kong higher education institutions in order to obtain a larger data set to gain a glimpse of Hong Kong students from different institutes and programmes. Approximately 400 students were invited across eight different institutions. By the end of three months, 146 questionnaires were completed and returned, giving a return rate of 36%. This sample number was adequate for an exploratory study.

Qualitative data were collected from the same cohort of students in the Bachelor of Education programmes of the higher education institute which was where the research was being conducted. All interviewees were full-time Year 4 students and the interviews were conducted from May to December 2009. I targeted this sample of students for three reasons. First, the interviewees were from the same cohort of a higher education institute. Thus, the variability of their study environment or setting would be minimised. In this way, it would serve as one kind of triangulation and benefit the comparison of their views. Second, only full-time undergraduate students are entitled to participate in the exchange or immersion programmes in the institute. Third, students who studied abroad usually have completed the programme by the end of the first semester in Year 3. Therefore, they would have the freshest memories of their study abroad experiences if I carried out the data collection process during the second semester of Year 3 or the first semester of Year 4. Twelve participants, seven Hong Kong and five Mainland Chinese students, who had joined either the exchange or immersion programme, were selected for interview. The samples were selected without any consideration of background, gender or academic results. The students were chosen because they agreed to participate after the researcher had invited them. In the beginning, I asked the students whom I knew in the institute.

Then, snowball sampling was adopted as I asked the interviewees if they could recommend other potential interviewees until I reached my interview target. The time and place for the interview was chosen according to the interviewee's preference upon agreement between the interviewer and interviewee.

Before commencing the interviews, I asked them to sign the consent for the research, and gave them a copy. Again, I fully informed the interviewees of the purposes, instructions of the research, and gave the assurance of confidentiality through both verbal explanations before they commenced the interview and by written consent. In order to increase their incentive to participate in this research, I emphasised the importance of their contribution to the knowledge of this research area in my invitation. I acknowledged the time and effort they gave by sending them each an individual thank you card.

#### ***4.1.5 Data analysis***

The research hypothesis of this study is that there could be differences in the nature of the responses between pairs of participants: (1) study abroad and non study abroad participants, and (2) Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students. I hypothesised that study abroad and non study abroad participants might perceive values of study abroad programmes or issues faced in deciding to study abroad differently. Since Hong Kong students and Mainland Chinese have grown up with different backgrounds, they might embrace different life values. Even after 1997, when Hong Kong returned to the People's Republic of China, Hong Kongers and Mainland Chinese have been living under 'one country two systems'. Thus, I hypothesised they might have a different lens through which to look at the student mobility issue, in particular against a wider context of the uneven affects of globalisation on national economies and cultures. Thus, one of the analysis strategies was built upon the comparison between these two groups of participants.

The software program SPSS was utilised to manage and analyse the survey data. Descriptive statistics was carried out on the survey data. Means and standard

deviations were calculated for respective variables. Independent variables were coded by gender and the background of the respondents, including institution, programme, and age group. Creation of new variables and additional recoding were also necessary to facilitate various analyses. For example, I created two comparison groups of Hong Kong versus Mainland Chinese students. Hong Kong students were coded 1 and Mainland Chinese students were coded 2. In order to determine the correct percentages of study abroad participants from the total sample, I recoded the variable of those who had participated in exchange, immersion, or both exchange and immersion programmes into one category as study abroad participants for comparison with non study abroad participants. Descriptive statistics were presented as means and standard deviations for each item in the questionnaire. Independent t-tests were performed to compare means. Paired t-tests were also performed in an attempt to examine if there was any gap between the different groups of participants, as well as the perceived values and the influences on the study abroad participants. Chi-square tests were run on cross tabulations of categorical variables to test for significance among several of the categorical descriptive frequencies, for example, a descriptive breakdown of study abroad and non study abroad participants by gender and nationality.

Throughout the analysis of the interviews and responses from the open-ended questions of the questionnaire, computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), 'NVivo 8', was applied. This software was used to assist in managing and analysing the data emerging from the transcriptions. The main advantage of using CAQDAS is to speed up the coding progress into categories. It saves time and effort in filing and retrieving the data. NVivo also helps to map out ideas in visual display through linking to different 'nodes' and models. I invited another researcher to cross-check all of the coding and categorisations. The set of codes was refined upon discussion of the differences in coding and categorising the themes. The reliability of the data analysis was enhanced through this cross-checking and auditing process.

## 4.2 Reliability and Validity

Quality research should be tested for reliability and validity (Seale, 2004). Reliability is the extent to which a measure will produce consistent results. For this study design, the high sample size of questionnaires adds to the reliability. Including multiple sets of data for comparison could also increase reliability. As I was the only interviewer, the interviews could be conducted with the same format and sequence of words. The same questions were asked in the same way so that the interviewees might understand the questions in the same way (Silverman, 1993). Thus, reliability could be increased in this way (Fowler, 1993). In this research, data collected from two different groups of people, Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students could also be considered to achieve triangulation within a method in which two or more viewpoints are obtained on a particular occasion. As many variables can be crosschecked within these two groups of participants, it aims to establish a higher degree of internal consistency. In analysing the data, I also invited another researcher to code the text in order to improve its reliability.

Validity of research is important as it asks whether the research measured what it intended to (Carmines & Zeller, 1979). In other word, it asks whether the research accurately describes the phenomenon which it is intended to describe (Bush, 2002). Validity can be distinguished as two types — internal and external validity. Internal validity refers to the accuracy of the research findings that represent the phenomenon under investigation, whereas external validity relates to the extent to which the findings may be generalised to the wider population that the sample represents (Bush, 2002).

The most practical way of achieving validity is to reduce the amount of bias as much as possible. Therefore, I conducted both pilot questionnaires and interviews to explore the possible missing perspectives so that I might reduce the amount of bias by refining the questions to facilitate the participants to understand them better in the formal data collection processes. Pilot administrative procedures were also necessary for ensuring that they worked efficiently, and as the

researcher intended (Fogelman, 2002). As such, I conducted three pilot interviews before I started the formal interviews, and administered seven pilot questionnaires before finalizing the questionnaire items. The pilot interviewees were two females and one male, two being Hong Kongers and one from Mainland China. This initial study yielded some suggestions as to the perceived value and challenges of the studying abroad students. It was particularly useful for me in understanding the concurrent Mainland China students. I refined the questions accordingly to explore the possible missing perspectives and to rework the questions to ensure validity and reliability. For example, I found that it would be easier to obtain information concerning the impacts on the study abroad programme if I explained the question by providing some examples. For the Mainland Chinese students, most of the questions needed to be asked with regards to two levels: one level concerning the experience of studying in the undergraduate programme in Hong Kong and the other concerning the experience of participating in the short-term exchange or immersion programme in other countries.

I also used these initial pilot findings to revise the questionnaires by including some additional items or rephrasing the questions. To ensure that the language of the questionnaire was valid, I gave it to two professionals, one Chinese academic and one English native speaker, for language checking. Modifications were made accordingly. In addition, the modified questionnaire was piloted with four graduates, two with and two without prior study abroad experience.

Sources of bias in interviews might appear according to the diverse characteristics of the interviewer, the respondent and the substantive content of the questions (Bush, 2002). In particular, the researcher's judgment may be affected by their role as a researcher in the setting in which the research was being carried out. In order to avoid the problems of misinterpreting the responses, feedback to the participants and probe questions also helped to facilitate communication with other intended questions, and enhance the validity of the interviews. During the interviews, probe questions were used to determine whether they required further clarification. After the interviews, the transcriptions were given to the participants

for comment and confirmation in order to cross-check individual answers and meanings with the interviewees.

For qualitative research, validity for the most part is established on a logical basis which requires comprehensive description and thorough documentation (Cohen & Manion, 1994). The breadth of the survey may be sacrificed for the depth of the interview, meaning that representativeness and external validity may be seen as questionable. Therefore, originality and discovery, rather than external validity, are seen as indicators of the quality of this qualitative part of the research (Seale, 2004). Crosschecking data is essential as a means of establishing validity by comparing different sources of evidence in order to determine the accuracy of the information or phenomena (Bush, 2002). Some of the variables were crosschecked with the data in the two data sets obtained from the survey and the interview. To improve research validity, I documented and explained the data-gathering procedures clearly, especially to the participants. Employing several methods also served to attain the goal of triangulation.

### **4.3 Limitations**

As there were a small number of non-Chinese students scattered across the cohort, English translation of the questions was provided under the Chinese version in the same questionnaire. However, I conducted the interviews in either Cantonese or Mandarin as appropriate in order to help the interviewees understand the questions better. As it was necessary to translate the participants' responses into English for reporting in this study, I discussed with another translator to crosscheck the translations of both the questions and responses in order to make them as accurate as possible and to minimise any potential misunderstanding of the meanings.

Considering that the researcher is a staff member of the same institute the interviewees were studying in, influences of power must be taken into account in analysing informants' interpretations of their own situation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). As I, the interviewer, engaged in dialogue with the interviewees, I had to



be cautious that my own personal views should not be revealed or affect those of the interviewees. However, it was inevitable that my theoretical views influenced the way I talked, and the interviewees' views were simultaneously shaping my theoretical views (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Therefore, I asked another researcher outside this institute to cross-check my analysis.

I did not aim to generalise the pattern of the responses as this research was only carried out using a relatively small sample. Although the relationships or associations of the independent variables were established in the survey, they may not necessarily be causal connections. The variations in the samples across the questionnaire survey could produce bias in assessing the correlation of responses between different groups of participants. Perhaps the results generated by the qualitative analysis could rectify this defect to some extent.

#### **4.4 Ethical Issues**

Ethical problems arise not only in methodologies, but also in involving an inside researcher during the research process. Confidentiality is an important issue that participants are most concerned about. Hence, all participants were fully informed about the aims and purposes of the research, and they were assured of confidentiality through both information sheets and verbal explanations of the questionnaire and the interview. Before each respondent participated in this research, I promised that no one would read the individual answers other than the researcher. The content of the questionnaire and interview would only be reported as anonymous results. Furthermore, all participants were assured that they were free to participate or withdraw at any time without being required to provide a reason, and the researcher would desist immediately from any actions that caused emotional or other harm during the research process. Consent forms were signed by all interviewees and obtained before I proceeded with any data collecting procedure.

The fact that the researcher was a member of staff currently working in this higher education setting might be problematic. Firstly, authority and hierarchy concepts

might cause anxiety for the participants such that they might not tell the whole truth. The perceived power of the internal researcher would influence the participants' decisions on what information to give and how they would present it, as they might fear what the researcher would do with the given information (Busher, 2002). The validity of the research might also be affected. Thus, I revealed myself as a non-teaching staff member prior to their participation and emphasised that the results would not be used as an assessment of the participants, nor would they be divulged to others, including the destination institution. Secondly, I could easily access some of the information such as internal documents or private conversations with the participants. The ethical dilemma 'Should the information be used for research purposes?' emerged. To eliminate this dilemma, I gathered this kind of information under normal research rubrics of confidentiality (Busher, 2002). I was also aware that some participants might try to use the researcher as a channel to pursue other political agendas such as complaining about some staff in the institute. If such situations happened, I would acknowledge their negative feelings but redirect them to the focus of the interview question. There was no inducement, such as gifts or payments, for encouraging participation. Yet, I motivated them by emphasising the importance of their contributions in my invitation.

All data analyses from this study would only be released in aggregate form to ensure confidentiality and individual privacy. Each participant would be assigned a pseudonym throughout the analysis and reporting processes. After data compilation and analyses, all individual data used for the study would be destroyed. Lastly, in reporting or writing papers for publication, I would seek advice from other experienced researchers to avoid involving sensitive issues that might be misused for other purposes. For example, I needed to rephrase some interviewees' responses as they involved some sensitive issues such as political issues or judgmental terms. In such cases, I often cross-checked the quotations with another researcher to see whether the rephrased translations were appropriate so that I could report such results in a more sensitive way.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the methodology for the research in order to answer the research questions of this study. To understand the complexities of student mobility phenomena emerging in short-term study abroad in the context of Hong Kong higher education, it is necessary to adopt a mixed methodology comprised of quantitative and qualitative research methods by which data were collected and analysed from multi-level perspectives. This methodology was then used to triangulate the questionnaire data (one round) with interview data (two rounds) collected in different phases including two pilot studies (refer to Figure 4.1). Since both questionnaire and interviews were designed on the basis of the student participants' self-reporting, I could directly obtain their first-hand perceptions and experiences of participating in short-term study abroad programmes.

This mixed methodology facilitated this study with the following benefits: 1) the development of a comparative model for analysis of different types of collected data; 2) the formation of multi-level perspectives which pointed to the significant findings by triangulating the data as if cross checking so the issues of reliability and validity could be made aware and addressed; and 3) as a consequence, richer and broader understandings of emerging student mobility through short-term study abroad in practices were obtained. In particular, the student survey by questionnaire examined what issues the students faced in deciding to join the study abroad programmes. Meanwhile, the interviews identified what influences the programmes had on the students underlying those issues identified in the questionnaire responses. Therefore, the interview findings and the questionnaire results interacted with and were complementary to each other so that we could look at the studied matters at different levels and from different angles.

By adopting this research methodology, I was able to acquire wider student perspectives on possible student mobility emerging in those short-term study programmes to seek answers to the research questions based on the data. As stated in Chapter 1, I anticipate that other researchers can benefit from this methodology by replicating it for other studies in different settings, although I do not intend to

generalise this study. This mixed methodology may provide an interactive research model (refer to Figure 4.1) for better understanding of the issues of short-term study abroad programmes in university curricula. This study might also serve as a pilot for a large-scale research study across countries or regions. The findings derived from both the quantitative and qualitative data will be presented in Chapters 5 to 8.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **STUDENTS' CHARACTERISTICS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the background of the study's participants by delineating the characteristics of the interviewees and the questionnaire respondents. It makes a comparison between this study's participants and the populations of Hong Kong higher education students based on the government statistics and the study abroad participants from some of the higher education institutions in Hong Kong. It also compares the samples within this study among different groups. Understanding these students' characteristics is essential to help interpret the results of the following chapters. Chapters 6 to 8 will present an analysis of the empirical data from the questionnaire survey and the two rounds of interviews based on the participants described in this chapter.

#### **5.1 Overview of the Participants**

All questionnaire respondents and interviewees were registered as full-time students in one of the Hong Kong higher education institutions during the data collection period between 2009 and 2010.

##### ***5.1.1 Interviewees' profile***

Regarding the qualitative portion, twelve student-teachers (N=12) were interviewed individually between the second semester of their third year and the

first semester of their fourth year (ie. May to December 2009) in the same higher education institute. They were studying the Bachelor of Education (BEd) with different majors including English, Chinese, Mathematics, Music and Business Studies. Seven participants were Hong Kong local students (N=7) and five participants came from Mainland China (N=5); these five participants hold permanent resident identity of the People's Republic of China but were studying in Hong Kong.

The interviewees had participated in at least either an exchange programme or an immersion programme. Some of the interviewees had participated in both types of programme. Exchange programme refers to a 'student exchange' programme that lasts for one semester and involves two-way movement of students between the institute and one of its partner institutions in a foreign country. Although students on exchange are not eligible for the award of qualifications offered by the partner institutions, they can apply for exemption from selected modules studied in the partner institutions, however they must have passed these modules for the exemption to be granted.

In this study, the 'immersion programme' refers to an immersion semester which is a compulsory part of the language programme. Government policy requires every full-time undergraduate language student-teacher the opportunity to undertake at least one international or Mainland experience during his/her course of study. In this higher education institute, all BEd(English) students will go abroad to live and study in an English-speaking country, such as Australia, the United Kingdom or Canada, while all BEd(Chinese) students will go abroad to live and study in a Putonghua-speaking city such as cities in Mainland China or Taiwan, in Year 3 Semester 1. The students will study for 15 weeks at a university and live with a local family, which is also called their host family. The aim of this experience is to enhance the students' language proficiency and widen their horizons. In addition, the students are also expected to learn more about the language cultures and other education systems in order to increase their general confidence and develop a wider worldview.

In reporting the findings, each participant was assigned a pseudonym beginning with either ‘H’ or ‘M’. “H” is for the Hong Kong participants and thus their pseudonyms are Henry, Hilda, Hannah and so forth, while “M” is for the Mainland Chinese participants whose pseudonyms are Maggie, Mason, Mina and so forth. The assigned pseudonym for the participants and the details of their background and study abroad participation are shown in Table 5.1.

*Table 5.1 Assigned pseudonym for the participants and the details of their background and study abroad participation*

	Pseudonym of the participant	Permanent resident identity	Sex	Type of study abroad programme	Study abroad host country	Bachelor of Education programme (Major)
1	Heidi	Hong Kong	F	Immersion	UK	English
2	Hannah	Hong Kong	F	Immersion	China	Chinese
3	Hilda	Hong Kong	F	Exchange	UK	English
				Immersion	UK	
4	Henry	Hong Kong	M	Exchange	Austria	Music
5	Holly	Hong Kong	F	Exchange	Australia	Mathematics
6	Howard	Hong Kong	M	Exchange	France	Business Studies
7	Hugo	Hong Kong	F	Exchange	China	Mathematics
8	Maggie	Mainland China	F	Immersion	UK	English
9	Megan	Mainland China	F	Exchange	Sweden	Business Studies
10	Mason	Mainland China	M	Exchange	UK	English
				Immersion	USA	
11	Mina	Mainland China	F	Immersion	UK	English
				Exchange	US	
12	Miranda	Mainland China	F	Immersion	UK	English

It is interesting to note that the study abroad host countries in all of the interviewees' profiles are either one of the 'Major player' (US, UK and Australia) or 'Middle player' (France, Austria and Sweden) groups (refer to Chapter 2) and China. Subsequent to my later investigation, it was found that the provisions of these short-term study abroad programmes in this institute are still dominated by students from the Major and Middle players. The BEd(English), students who participated in both exchange and immersion programmes chose to exchange in an English-speaking country again after their prior immersion in an English-speaking country.

### *5.1.2 Questionnaire summary*

The reliability Cronbach's alpha, a commonly used internal consistency reliability measure (Cortina, 1993), of the four parts of the questionnaire were computed in SPSS. The alpha values for parts A, B, C and D were respectively 0.87, 0.79, 0.78 and 0.89. The alpha reliability of the items in parts A and D indicates that the scale had good reliability, and those in parts B and C had moderate reliability.

A brief overview background of the 146 questionnaire respondents from eight higher education institutions is shown in Table 5.2. It includes the age group, the institution and the year the respondents were studying. A total of 35.6% of the respondents were from the Hong Kong Institute of Education, 26% from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University and 11.6% from the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The majority, 87% of respondents, were undergraduate students studying across years 1 to 4, and 13% were postgraduate students. An overwhelming majority of the students (82.2%) surveyed were aged between 20 and 24.



*Table 5.2 Headcount and relative percentage of the study by institution, year and age range*

	Study sample	
	Headcount	Percentage %
Institution		
The Hong Kong Institute of Education	52	35.6
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University	38	26.0
The Chinese University of Hong Kong	17	11.6
Lingnan University	13	8.9
City University of Hong Kong	10	6.8
The University of Hong Kong	8	5.5
Hong Kong Baptist University	4	2.8
The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology	4	2.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100</b>
Year population		
Year 1	19	13.1
Year 2	23	15.9
Year 3	29	20.0
Year 4	55	37.9
Postgraduate (including Master and PhD)	19	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age Population		
Below 19	14	9.6
20-24	120	82.2
25-29	8	5.5
30 or above	4	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100.0</b>

## 5.2 Comparison of this Study Sample with the UGC Population

A comparison of headcount and relative percentage by gender and nationality between this study sample of 146 questionnaire respondents and Hong Kong students funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC: 2009a) in 2008/09 is shown in Table 5.3. The University Grants Committee (UGC) of Hong Kong is a non-statutory advisory committee responsible for advising the Government of the Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China on the development and funding needs of higher education institutions in the SAR.

*Table 5.3 Comparison of headcount and relative percentage between this study sample and the 2008/09 Hong Kong UGC-funded students by gender and nationality*

	Study sample		2008/09 Hong Kong UGC-funded	
	Headcount	Percentage %	Headcount	Percentage %
Gender				
Male	65	45.1%	31,027	47.8%
Female	79	54.9%	33,874	52.2%
Total	144	100%	64,901	100%
Nationality				
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR)	106	72.6%	56,488	87.0%
People’s Republic of China (Mainland Chinese)	33	22.6%	6732	10.4%
Other countries	7	4.8%	1681	2.6%
Total	146	100%	64,901	100%

Of the valid sample, about 45.1% (N=65) are male and the remaining 54.9% (N=79) of the students are female. The UGC-funded student statistics (UGC, 2009) show that there were 64,901 students, including 47.8% male (N=31,027) and 52.2% female (N=33,874), enrolled in the UGC-funded programme in Hong Kong during 2008/09 (see Table 5.6). The percentages of the gender distribution in this study sample are thus very similar to those of the UGC-funded students in Hong Kong higher education.

Concerning the distribution of nationalities, about 72.6% are Hong Kong local students, 22.6% are students from Mainland China and the remaining 4.8% students are from other countries, including Australia, Germany and Singapore. This means that there are 27.4% non-local students. Compared with the UGC statistics showing that there are 13% non-local students (10.4% from Mainland China and 2.6% from other countries), the percentage of this study sample, 27.4% non-local students, is much higher. However, this result is not surprising because 27.4% non-local students may include both full-time enrolment and foreign exchange students, while the UGC data only refers to full-time enrolment students.

5.3 Comparison of this Study Sample with Institutions' Populations

Regarding the short-term study abroad participation, there is no official data published by the government or any higher education institution in Hong Kong. Therefore, I sought this information from some gatekeepers who were working in three higher education institutions in order to make a comparison of exchange students between this study sample and other higher education institutions. A comparison of headcount and relative percentage of exchange students between this study sample and Hong Kong UGC-funded full-time undergraduate students of three higher education institutions, in the academic year 2008/09, is shown in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Comparison of headcount and relative percentage of exchange students between this study sample and Hong Kong UGC-funded full-time undergraduate students of three higher education institutions in the academic year 2008/09

	Study sample	Institution A	Institution B	Institution C
	Headcount (Percentage %)	Headcount (Percentage %)	Headcount (Percentage %)	Headcount (Percentage %)
Exchange programme participants	54 (37%)	32 (1%)	624 (6%)	550 (6%)
Non exchange programme participants	81 (63%)	2116 (99%)	9934 (94%)	8654 (94%)
Total students	145	2148	10558	9204

In all, 37% of the respondents participated at least once in a short-term (lasting one week to one semester) exchange programme, and 63% did not participate in any exchange programme. This comparison shows that this study sample has the highest percentage of exchange students with 37%, while both Institutions B and C have 6% and Institution A has only 1% of exchange students in the academic year 2008/09.

However, it should be cautioned that this comparison is only for a broad reference since the three institutional statistics only captured the statistics within one year, while this study sample might report the experiences of the respondents during the past several years under their undergraduate or postgraduate programmes. Furthermore, these institutional statistics might not cover a wide range of varieties of programmes that involved a range of variables such as structure, duration, educational objectives and the implementation process of those study abroad programmes across different institutions, faculties or departments.

### 5.4 Comparison between Groups: Genders, Nationality and Study Abroad Participation

For the following results, study abroad participants refers to students who had either participated in exchange, immersion, or both kinds of programmes, regardless of the duration of the programme. In order to examine if there is any relationship between different groups and participation in study abroad programmes, chi-square tests were run in SPSS on cross tabulations of categorical variables to test for significance among several of the categorical descriptive frequencies.

First, chi-square tests were performed to test whether there was any significance among two categorical variables, gender and study abroad or non study abroad participants. The results showed that there was no relationship between the tendency towards participating in a study abroad programme and gender ( $\chi^2 = 1.513$ ,  $DF=1$ ,  $p = 0.219$ ) as shown in Table 5.5.

*Table 5.5 Comparison of gender between study abroad and non study abroad participants*

	Study abroad participants	Non Study abroad participants	Total
Male	25	40	65
Female	38	40	78
<b>Total</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>143</b>

*Pearson Chi-square value = 1.513, DF=1, p = 0.219*

Second, a chi-square test was performed to test whether there was any level of significance among two categorical variables, gender and nationality: Hongkongers or Mainland Chinese, of the participants. The results showed that there was no relationship between gender and whether they were Hongkongers or Mainland Chinese studying in Hong Kong ( $\chi^2 = 0.05$ ,  $DF=1$ ,  $p = 0.823$ ) as shown in Table 5.6.

*Table 5.6 Comparison of gender between the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese participants*

	Hong Kong participants	Mainland Chinese participants	Total
Male	45	13	58
Female	60	19	79
<b>Total</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>137</b>

*Pearson Chi-square value = 0.05, DF=1, p = 0.823*

Third, a chi-square test was performed to test whether there was significance among two categorical variables, nationality and whether the participants studied abroad. The results showed that there was no relationship between the tendency towards participating in a study abroad programme and whether they were Hongkongers or Mainland Chinese studying in Hong Kong ( $\chi^2 = 1.086$ ,  $DF=1$ ,  $p = 0.297$ ) as shown in Table 5.7.

*Table 5.7 Comparison between Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students by the study abroad and non study abroad participants*

	Study abroad participants	Non Study abroad participants	Total
Hong Kong students	42	64	106
Mainland Chinese students	16	16	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>138</b>

*Pearson Chi-square value = 1.086, DF=1, p = 0.297*

To conclude, the chi-square tests show that there is no relationship between gender or nationality and participation in study abroad programmes.

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter provides a statistical sketch of the characteristics of the studied participants, the target population in Hong Kong higher education and some institutions of this sector. In all, one hundred and forty-six (N=146) full-time higher education students returned the questionnaires of this study. During August to December 2009, twelve students (N=12) from the same higher education institute, including seven Hong Kong (N=7) and five Mainland Chinese (N=5), were interviewed twice individually for this study. Cronbach's alpha tests for the questionnaire were conducted, and the results are by and large satisfactory. In comparison with the Hong Kong UGC-funded students, this study has similar gender distribution. However, it has a slightly higher percentage of non-local students than the UGC-funded students. On the other hand, in comparison with three Hong Kong higher institutions, this study sample has a higher percentage of exchange programme participants.

Chi-square tests were also performed between groups on three subsamples, namely gender, nationality and study abroad participants. It was found that there was no relationship between: (1) the tendency towards participating in a study abroad programme and gender; (2) the tendency towards gender and whether they were Hongkongers or Mainland Chinese studying in Hong Kong and (3) the tendency towards participating in a study abroad programme and whether they were Hongkongers or Mainland Chinese, respectively. The next chapter will further investigate the students' preferences in selecting the host country as well as their perceived value and impacts of study abroad programmes.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES OF STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMMES**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

The previous Chapter 5 has provided us with overall information concerning the participants' characteristics and used this to create a general comparison of the UGC and institutional figures in Hong Kong. The following three chapters, Chapters 6 to 8 are important for presenting the students' perspectives of study abroad programmes through the questionnaire and interview results. They provide us with a broader understanding of student mobility in Hong Kong, framed by the three research questions posed in Chapter 1:

- (1) What are the students' perceived value and the impacts of study abroad programmes in higher education?
- (2) What issues do the students face in deciding to participate in a study abroad programme?
- (3) What are the students' views on attaining a global perspective and how do study abroad programmes contribute to attaining a global perspective?

In this Chapter, I will report all of the survey data, and then use the interview data to interpret and clarify those results. For each of these chapters, the questionnaire results will be presented by statistical figures, including percentage, rank, and the scaling mean and standard derivation of the students' responses for each item examined, while the interview results are delineated by content analysis. Most findings are presented, first by quantitative data which shows the trends of the

findings, followed by the interview data which serves as complementary to the survey findings and attempts to provide more insight into the issue.

This chapter aims to identify the students’ preferences in selecting a host country, and directly answers the first research question: what are the students’ perceived value and the impacts of study abroad programmes in higher education? The findings of the data analysis are presented in three main parts: preference in selecting a host country, the students’ perceived value of studying abroad, and the students’ perceived impacts of study abroad programmes.

### 6.1 Preference in Selecting a Host Country

Regarding the survey respondents’ ranked order for the ‘most preferred’ host country if they had a chance to participate in an exchange or immersion programme, the major players (refer to Chapter 2) are the students’ primary target followed by the middle players (refer to Chapter 2). This phenomenon is also reflected in the interviewees’ profile (refer to Chapter 5, section 5.1.1). Table 6.1 shows a summary of responses based on the respondents’ ranking order of these countries where ‘1’ represents the most preferred host country and ‘9’ is for the least preferred.

*Table 6.1 Summary of the responses for ranking ‘1’ as the most preferred host country for studying abroad*

	Number of students	Percentage of students (%)
UK	50	34.5
USA	28	19.3
China	15	10.3
Australia	14	9.7
Germany	14	9.7
France	12	8.3
Other European countries	6	4.1
Other Asian countries	3	2.1
African countries	1	.7
Middle East countries	1	.7
New Zealand	1	.7
<b>Total</b>	145	100.0



More than half of the participants of the entire sample (53.8%) chose either the UK or the USA as their most preferred host country to study abroad. The UK (34.5%) was chosen to be the 'most preferred' country for studying abroad, followed by the USA (19.3%), China (10.3%), Australia (9.7%), Germany (9.7%) and France (8.3%), respectively. The findings show that there were almost twice the number of respondents who chose the UK (N=50) in preference to the USA (N=28) among the major player group.

Interestingly, China was the third most preferred destination (N=15) for the study abroad programmes. This is quite surprising because most of the respondents, 139 out of 145 students, were either Hongkongers or Mainland Chinese. These fifteen respondents who chose China as their most preferred destination included eight Hongkongers (N=8), five Mainland Chinese (N=5) and two overseas students (N=2). The students seemed to have increasing interest in choosing China as a host destination to study abroad, in particular for short-term programmes (10.3%). This increasing interest may be accounted for by a few reasons:

1. Cost was a main concern among the students. Choosing China as the host country is usually much cheaper than other countries.

*'Participating in an exchange programme in China only cost me \$HK4,000. That is a lot cheaper compared to other Western countries which would have cost at least \$HK14,000 or even more.'* (Hugo).

2. The increasing interest in the cultural value of China and the need to improve Putonghua proficiency.

*'I chose China as a destination for an exchange programme because I wanted to know more Chinese culture and improve my Putonghua proficiency'* (Hugo).

3. Students might regard China as a rising country which is worth exploring. One Mainland student indicated that:

*'People often like to go to the strongest countries to broaden their*

*horizons. Although the US is still the strongest country in the world, China will probably replace it in this position one day. '(Mina)*

One Hong Kong student also suggested that:

*'Chinese economic power is rising enormously. There are a lot of business opportunities. As Hongkongers, we have the advantage to reap the first harvest if we enter this market earlier. Besides, we have the advantage of speaking better English than the Mainland Chinese, so we might have better job opportunities in China' (Howard).*

Another two major and middle players, Australia and Germany both ranked as the fourth most preferred host country. These two countries were chosen by 14 respondents followed by France which was chosen by 12 respondents.

The overall result of the respondents' most preferred destination for participating in short-term study abroad (exchange) programmes is slightly different from the results of international students studying abroad worldwide. The OBHE (2007) and GAO (2009) results showed that the U.S. has the highest percentage (22%), followed by the UK (12%) and Australia (11%) in the international student market. There are two reasons that might account for these differences. First, students might have different preferences when it comes to participating in short-term study abroad programmes and studying abroad. As security issues is one of the key concerning factors (refer to Chapter 7, section 7.1), it is not surprising that the USA was not the most preferred host country for the study abroad participants, particularly after 9/11 in 2001. The interview findings also reflect that some participants perceived that *'the USA is not as safe as the UK'* (Holly). This result is echoed by the GAO (2009) report that the U.S. share of international students worldwide dropped from 26 to 20 percent between 2000 and 2008. Yet, the U.S. (19.3%) remained the second most preferred country for short-term programmes in this study.

Second, in view of the OBHE and GAO figures, as current market share distributions may change as China grows more popular as a choice for studying abroad, it may also be growing more popular for students who want to participate in short-term study abroad programmes. However, this study was conducted

mainly for Chinese students. It cannot examine the general growing popularity of China as a host destination among international students.

**6.2 Perceived Value of Studying Abroad through Study Abroad Programmes**

In this section, the findings from the survey and interview data for the students’ perceived value of studying abroad through study abroad programmes is presented. For the survey results, it is noted that a score of 1 indicates ‘strongly disagree’, 2 indicates ‘disagree’, 3 indicates ‘undecided/neutral’, 4 refers to ‘agree’ and 5 refers to ‘strongly agree’. Table 6.2 lists the means and the standard deviations of all items of the perceived values of studying abroad in descending order.

*Table 6.2 Means and standard deviations of the perceived value of studying abroad*

		Mean	Std. Deviation
A3	Broaden my horizons	4.45	.65423
A8	Provide me with great opportunities to travel	4.26	.70520
A4	Assist my personal growth	4.23	.71478
A9	Learn about the culture of the host country	4.20	.78450
A1	Enhance my proficiency in the host country’s language	4.18	.71134
A14	Improve my CV	4.15	.79347
A2	Help me to learn to be independent	4.13	.78137
A6	Make local friends in the host country	4.09	.77206
A7	Make international friends from other countries, other than those of the host country	4.03	.80747
A5	Build closer relationships with the students I go with from the same institution	3.92	.74358
A19	Learn about new perspectives from my own country	3.88	.74176
A10	Learn about different cultures from other international students studying in the host country	3.85	.83329
A20	Enhance my view of national identity	3.67	.85589
A18	Increase my awareness of globalisation	3.61	.83355
A13	Enhance my professional skills and knowledge	3.60	.78327
A15	Enhance my future employment opportunities	3.60	.91157
A12	Help me to develop new study habits/skills	3.54	.78155
A11	Enhance my academic performance	3.03	.84645
A17	Help my future migration opportunities	2.66	.85293
A16	Defer my original academic progress in the home country	2.62	.90576

The results reflect that the respondents highly valued nine items (A3, A8, A4, A9, A1, A14, A2, A6 and A7) of the perceived value of study abroad programme, where the mean lay between the range of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' (ie. 4.0 < Mean < 5.0). Meanwhile, they moderately valued eight items (A5, A19, A10, A20, A18, A13, A15 and A12) for which the means fell between the range of 3.5 and 4.0. Interestingly, respondents were not convinced that studying abroad could help them enhance their academic performance (A11 mean=3.03), or help future migration opportunities (A17 mean=2.66), and they did not regard that it would defer their original academic progress in the home country (A16 mean=2.62). In sum, the students tended to perceive that participating in an exchange programme could benefit them in general.

#### ***6.2.1 Personal development as the students' major benefit of studying abroad***

Among the 20 items of the perceived value of studying abroad through study abroad programmes, the mean score of broadening horizons (A3 mean=4.45) is the highest, followed by providing great opportunities to travel (A8 mean=4.26) and assisting personal growth (A4 mean=4.23). I conceptualise these attributes as falling within the category of 'personal development'. The high mean score implies that the respondents have a tendency towards 'strongly agree' with personal development as a major benefit of joining the programmes. The attribute 'help me to learn to be independent' is also relatively high (A2 mean=4.13) and also falls into this category. These high mean scores show that the students strongly believed the most beneficial aspect of studying abroad is to facilitate their personal development, including broadening their horizons, assisting their personal growth, providing them with opportunities to travel, and helping them to be independent.

The interview findings are consistent with the questionnaire findings. All eight interviewees (N=8) who participated in exchange programmes regarded that the main reason they wanted to study abroad was to broaden their horizons. Six interviewees stressed the importance of personal growth, learning to be

independent and travel were their prior expectations. One interviewee concluded these interview findings as follows:

*'Through travelling with friends and learning to live away from family, I have learnt to be more independent during my study abroad period in the UK. My horizons have been broadened. Personally, I believe I have grown a lot more confident than before. It has been a fantastic experience in my life.'* (Hilda)

This participant not only acknowledged that enhancing personal development was a significant benefit brought about by the study abroad programme, but she also emphasized that participating in such programmes is a valuable experience.

#### ***6.2.2 Cultural and social development as the students' initial motivations to study abroad***

The results show that the respondents perceived that learning the culture of the host country (A9 mean=4.20), making local friends in the host country (A6 mean=4.09), making international friends from other countries (A7 mean=4.03) and building closer relationships with the students they went with from the same institution (A5 mean=3.92) were relatively high benefits of participating in exchange programmes. I conceptualise these attributes as a category of 'cultural and social development'.

The interview results show that all twelve interviewees (N=12) reflected that one of their initial motivations for studying abroad was to learn about the culture of the host country. One interviewee recalled that:

*'My initial motivation [to join the exchange programme] was to experience living in a foreign country. I hoped to explore different cultures, to understand and to compare the differences between the host country and Hong Kong.'* (Henry)

This result is consistent with Cash's (1993) study of 353 participants over a 10 year period showing that the greatest gains from studying abroad were increased appreciation of different cultures, followed by growth in independence, maturity

and self-awareness. All these attributes can be aggregated to this ‘cultural and social development’ category.

### ***6.2.3 Learning language skills as a discipline dependent factor***

While the mean score of enhancing proficiency in the host country’s language (Al mean=4.18) comes fifth on the list, many studies show that the most beneficial aspect of studying abroad is improving language skills (Oppen *et al.*, 1990; Teichler & Janson, 2007 and Tremblay, 2003). Yet, enhancing language proficiency is only ranked fifth as a study abroad benefit in this study. This result may be accounted for by the fact that the study abroad programmes these participants were referring to were only short-term programmes. The results may be different when applied to long-term study abroad programmes. This result is also in line with some research findings showing that studying abroad participants regarded understanding foreign cultures and societies and personal development as being more important than language skills enhancement (Teichler & Janson, 2007; Wiers-Jenssen, 2003).

All of the six BEd (Language)<sup>5</sup> interviewees, along with only two interviewees studying in other disciplines, reflected that learning the language of the host country was one of their primary reasons for studying abroad. One interviewee who was majoring in music education and went to Austria for an exchange offered the following reflection:

*‘I wanted to learn German, the major language used in Austria. However, there was still a language barrier since we only stayed in Austria for four months. It’s very difficult to speak a new language fluently. Furthermore, the Austrian students usually spoke to us in English’ (Henry).*

This reflection illustrates that even when the study abroad students wanted to learn a new language in the host country, the local students tried to communicate with them in English. Usually, when the exchange students went to host countries which were not English-speaking or Putonghua-speaking, they did not have high

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<sup>5</sup> BEd(Language) students refer to both BEd(English Language) and BEd(Chinese Language) students.

expectations of enhancing their ability in the native language such as Swedish, French or German in a short exchange period such as a few months. This was because they had no prior knowledge of the native language. Another interviewee, who was majoring in business education, recalled his prior expectations about language skills enhancement:

*'Previously, I applied for the exchange programme in the UK because I wanted to improve my English. Unfortunately, I wasn't accepted for that programme for I failed the English entrance test. Instead, I got accepted to participate in the exchange programme in France. I had no prior knowledge of French [as a language]. So, I didn't have much expectation of learning French. Even now, after living in France for five months, I can only remember a few words in French.'* (Howard).

This finding argues that not all exchange students benefited greatly in the language skills enhancement aspect, as it all depended on the objectives of the students, the length of the exchange programme, and whether the language of the host country was familiar to the students. These interview findings suggest that there may be a major difference between the objective of Language students and students of other disciplines when studying abroad. However, the questionnaire sample of Language students was too small to be tested to see if there was a statistically significant difference regarding this issue. Therefore, only the interview data may provide some clue about this phenomenon.

#### ***6.2.4 Professional and academic enhancement as less value-added***

The mean scores of helping to develop new study habits/skills (A12 mean=3.54), enhancing professional skills and knowledge (A13 mean=3.60) and enhancing academic performance (A11 mean=3.03) suggests that the students had a tendency towards being undecided about whether professional or academic enhancement was perceived as a benefit of participating in a study abroad programme. They turned out to be three of the least perceived benefits among all of the items. This phenomenon might be explained through the interview data; that *'some study abroad students focused too much on travelling and neglected their academic work or the learning purpose of studying abroad'* (Mina). This result is echoed in the questionnaire findings; that students valued much more highly the great

opportunities to travel (A8 mean=4.26). In addition, some students reflected that there was not much academic demand during the exchange semester.

*'I hardly thought about academic enhancement while I was studying abroad since I didn't take many modules. I only spent four hours on lectures each week. So, I thought of travelling most of the time. Actually, it took me a while to get myself together to pick up my study after I came back from the exchange programme.'* (Hugo)

The following interviewee further described her attitude towards learning academic matters during the exchange period:

*'I felt that it's more relaxing learning the academic matter because some of the modules I took in Australia could not be accredited by my home institute and so those modules were not taken account in my GPA'* (Holly).

Holding the same view, many interviewees believed that studying abroad may lead them to be either lazier in study or possibly mingle with friends who had a bad influence on them.

*'It [Studying abroad] might make you lazier in study for it is possible to meet some friends who might have a bad influence on you. I heard there were some students who changed to be too open in their dating relationships, which turned out to be a disaster when they were studying abroad'* (Hilda).

These findings seem to contradict Wiers-Jenssen's (2003) results; that studying abroad was not only found to be academically advantageous to the students but also those students regarded that they put more effort into their studies and believed that academic progress abroad was higher than during a corresponding period at home. This difference may be accounted for by the fact that the students in Wiers-Jenssen's (2003) study had at least one year of study abroad experience, while this present study focused on the responses of short-term study abroad participants. The short-term study abroad programmes the interviewees participated in were not especially academically focused.

Nonetheless, one interviewee provided positive feedback on enhancing her professional development after completing the exchange programme:



*'Now I have more confidence in teaching students. Thus, it [study abroad] could help me develop my profession [as a teacher].'* (Megan)

Some interviewees believed that studying abroad would indirectly benefit them in enhancing their professional development through enhancing their language skills and building their self-confidence.

#### ***6.2.5 Improving one's CV with study abroad programmes unequal to better employment opportunities***

Although the students did not value highly whether the study abroad programmes could enhance their future employment opportunities (A15 mean=3.59), interestingly, they regarded that improving their CVs (A14 mean=4.14) had a relatively high value with a high mean score. This finding seems contradictory. However, the lower mean score of enhancing future employment may be explained by their perception of the relatively low benefit of the three items concerning professional or academic enhancement (refer to the mean values of items A11, A12 and A13). This finding is echoed in the study of Teichler and Janson (2007) reporting that there was a decline in the positive influence by ERASMUS from the late 1980s to 2000. Several interviewees explained this phenomenon in their second interviews:

*'It all depends on what kind of job you would apply for. For example, as a Mathematics teaching professional, it is not a must to have study abroad experience. The most important thing is how you teach the students. Putting this kind (exchange) of experience in your CV is certainly an advantage, yet it does not mean that it would be a disadvantage without it.'* (Hugo).

Hugo saw that without study abroad experience put into his CV, it might disadvantage him. However, he felt that whether this experience could help enhance job opportunities was dependent on the nature of the job being applied for:

*'There are numerous factors that could affect your employment opportunities. Study abroad experience only provides you with one more means to present yourself, but it doesn't mean that you would have more job opportunities'* (Howard).

Howard regarded that study abroad participation was only one way to present oneself rather than being an element for enhancing job opportunities. Another interviewee argument suggested that:

*‘Unless you could obtain a formal certificate, the benefits of participating in study abroad experience were more limited to personal development rather than enhancing job opportunities’ (Heidi).*

Heidi reasoned that one critical factor for affecting one’s job opportunity is a certificate which could not be obtained from her short-term study abroad experience. Hence, she believed that neither the exchange nor the immersion programme which she participated in could help her gain more job opportunities. This view is supported by recent studies (Brache *et al.*, 2006; Teichler and Janson, 2007) revealing that the comparative advantage of short-term study abroad for enhancing international competences and leading to a positive impact on employment were declining. They proposed that this might be the result of two causes: short-term student mobility might have expanded more rapidly than the demand for the competences fostered; or international experience and learning might be spreading as a consequence of a general internationalisation and globalisation of society hence reducing the comparative advantage for the student.

### **6.3 Students’ Perceived Impacts of the Study Abroad Programmes**

Regarding the perceived impact of participating in the study abroad programmes, there were 64 study abroad participants who responded to the questions of part D in the survey. Table 6.3 lists the means and the standard deviations of all items of the perceived impacts of the study abroad programmes in descending order from the highest to the lowest mean scores.

*Table 6.3 Means and standard deviations of the perceived impacts of the studying abroad programmes*

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
D3	Broaden my horizons	64	4.52	.59073
D8	Provide me with great opportunities to travel	64	4.39	.63289
D9	Learn about the culture of the host country	64	4.35	.65143
D4	Assist my personal growth	64	4.27	.67241
D6	Make local friends in the host country	64	4.14	.70973
D1	Enhance my proficiency in the host country's language	64	4.14	.77392
D2	Help me to learn to be independent	64	4.14	.79417
D5	Build closer relationships with the students I go with from the same institution	64	4.13	.78680
D14	Improve my CV	64	4.13	.65465
D10	Learn about different cultures from other international students studying in the host country	64	4.03	.83512
D7	Make international friends from other countries, other than those of the host country	64	3.98	.91707
D22	This experience matched my prior expectations	64	3.97	.81589
D13	Enhance my professional skills and knowledge	63	3.87	.65972
D19	Learn new perspectives of my own country	64	3.86	.70973
D12	Help me to develop new study habits/skills	63	3.65	.76535
D20	Increase my awareness of different political environments	63	3.63	.82894
D15	Enhance my future employment opportunities	63	3.60	.95950
D18	Increase my awareness of globalization	64	3.55	.97476
D11	Enhance my academic performance	63	3.13	1.05482
D17	Help my future migration opportunities	63	2.78	.92361
D21	Felt discriminated against in some way	63	2.62	1.06904
D16	Defer my original academic progress in my home country	64	2.31	.85217

The survey results are consistent with the findings concerning the perceived values of studying abroad in part A which were shown in the previous section. Unsurprisingly, the mean scores of the items related to ‘personal development’ (D3, D4, D8, D9 corresponding to items in Part A) have the highest values as the most influential impacts of studying abroad. The findings are also generally consistent with the interviews. Again, the interview findings found that broadening one’s horizons and learning about different cultures are the main perceived impacts of study abroad programmes which are in line with their responses of the major perceived value.

*My horizons are broadened. It is impossible to know some other cultures or their customs if I have only been living in Hong Kong. For example, I would not have known that Thai see their heads being touched as a taboo if I had not studied abroad (Holly).*

Study abroad experience not only broadens a student's horizons, but also helps his/her personal development including improving language proficiency so as to equip the participant to share different cultures and increase his/her self-confidence.

*I never thought I would have such a great improvement in language. I have become much more confident. As for the culture aspect, I experienced the power of English for I could communicate with people from different nationalities through English. It was not as hard to adopt the language as I thought. (Maggie)*

Another interviewee reflected that:

*'I used to lack confidence and worried about how to deal with adolescent students in my teaching practice. But I have become more confident and less worried about being incapable of working with those students after participating in the exchange programme.'* (Megan)

Megan observed that she had grown in confidence so as to believe herself to be capable of dealing with the difficulties in her profession.

In sum, the students' perceived impacts of studying abroad align with the perceived value examined in the last section. Although the order of the attribute mean scores were slightly different, the alignment between the two parts (Part A and Part D) are matched in terms of the categories. Personal development, as a whole, is the major perceived value with the highest impact on the respondents who participated in the study abroad programmes. In the following sub-sections, I further examine the perceived impacts in detail.

### **6.3.1 The best and the most difficult part of the study abroad programmes**

The respondents were asked to answer two open-ended questions in the questionnaire: (1) the best part of the study abroad programme; and (2) the most

difficult part of the study abroad programme. Fifty-six study abroad participants (N=56) responded to at least one of the two questions. Forty-five participants (N=45) responded to both questions while nine participants (N=9) responded to the question of the best part of the study abroad programme, yet left the question of the most difficult part blank. In this case, I cannot be sure whether the nine participants (N=9) regarded that there was nothing difficult or whether they did not want to express their views. Table 6.4 is a summary of the responses identifying the best part and the most difficult part of the study abroad programmes.

*Table 6.4 Summary of responses identifying the best part and the most difficult part of the study abroad programmes*

		Study sample (N=56)
		Response frequency <sup>6</sup>
The best part of the study abroad programme		
	Learning about cultures or cultural exchange	22
	Meeting people of different cultures	12
	Travelling	11
	Professional knowledge	6
	Studying or learning skills	4
	Global perspectives	4
	Broaden horizons	4
	Host family	3
	Independent	3
	Self reflection on life	2
	Know more about my motherland	1
The most difficult part of the study abroad programme		
	Language barrier	15
	Overcoming cultural difference	14
	Limited budget	9
	Living conditions	5
	Study	3
	Limited time	2
	Course arrangement	2
	Live with peers	2
	Family opposition	1
	Miss family	1
	Need to be independent	1
	Blank answer	9

<sup>6</sup> Participants might mention more than one type of response.

The questionnaire respondents reported that the top three items regarded as the best parts of the study abroad programme were: learning about cultures or cultural exchange (N=22), meeting people of different cultures (N=12) and travelling (N=11). On the other hand, they reported that the top three most difficult parts of the study abroad programme were: language barriers (N=15) or overcoming cultural differences (N=14) and having a limited budget (N=9).

### **6.3.2 Learning while overcoming difficulties**

According to the results of the perceived impacts, the best and the most difficult parts of the study abroad programmes may suggest that learning takes place during the process of overcoming difficulties. Although the study abroad participants agreed that the programmes helped them enhance their proficiency in the host country's language (D1 mean=4.14), the results of the open-ended questions revealed that fifteen (N=15) study abroad participants noted that language barriers or communication difficulties were the most difficult parts of their experiences.

The interviews also supported these findings. One interviewee suggested that language barriers occurred not necessarily because of their insufficient language proficiency, but because of the different accents of the local people.

*'I could understand most of the content said by the lecturers, but I could hardly understand the local students' responses because of their accents.'*  
(Mason)

In addition, the interviewees recalled that they had overcome the language barriers through continuous practice in their daily lives while they were studying abroad.

*'The most difficult part was telephone communication because I had never spoken English on the phone before. I could not understand much about the phone conversation and did not know how to speak in the right manner. Nevertheless, gradually, I picked up how to speak properly through continuous practice and everyday use of English in our daily communication.'*  
(Megan.)

This case is in line with Vygotsky's (1978) theory which suggests that all cognitive processes including language acquisition occur from social interaction.

Similarly, twenty-two (N=22) respondents expressed that learning about cultures or cultural exchange were the best parts of the programme, while fourteen (N=14) respondents reported that overcoming cultural difference was the most difficult part of the programme. The interview findings show that few interviewees recalled negative experiences related to 'cultural differences'. These cultural differences they referred to were mainly different public behaviours in Mainland China or the social life cultures in the Western countries such as the UK, the USA, Europe and Australia. One interviewee who studied in Mainland China felt that:

*'Mainland Chinese culture is very different from that of Hongkongers. I am so amazed that they [Mainland Chinese] never lined up at the bus stops in China. Whenever the bus or train arrived, I didn't need to move at all because the people behind me would push me into the carriage while the people in front of me would try to push me out of the carriage. Travelling by public transport was always a challenge and a shocking experience.'* (Hugo).

Another interviewee who studied in Paris recalled that:

*'I guess there is a huge cultural difference in terms of social life between Chinese and Western cultures. Chinese like to have dinner gatherings rather than having some drinking parties as in Western cultures. Sometimes, I felt quite disturbed by the loud music and the mess around the dormitory when some Western students were having those drinking parties.'* (Howard)

Nevertheless, both Howard and Hugo regarded that understanding different cultures was their greatest achievement of participating in the study abroad programmes, regardless of the negative experiences. For example, Howard had learnt how to overcome difficulties through the conflicts.

*'The most impressive instance happened one night when some Spanish students got drunk and made a mess in the pantry. It really upset us. They not only wasted our food, but also wrote a note to humiliate a Chinese student...Finally, I plucked up the courage to confront these students and helped solve this problem. I am glad that happened so that I could learn to resolve conflicts and speak out. Besides, I made some self-reflection afterward and hoped I could do it better if this happens again.'* (Howard)

This reflection shows that Howard learned to resolve conflict with other people in this incident. He was grateful that a conflict occurred due to cultural differences because it helped him learn to deal with this kind of situation and to become more mature.

The cases of Megan and Howard illustrate that the study abroad students had learnt through overcoming difficulties that they came across in the host country. This is actually echoed by Lave's (1988) 'Situated Learning Theory' which is a theory of knowledge acquisition. According to this theory, learning requires social interaction and collaboration, and is often unintentional rather than deliberate. It argues that learning is a function of the context and culture in which it occurs and thus knowledge should be delivered in an authentic context and setting. This phenomenon was also explained by Oberg (1954). He suggested that when students, as strangers, are facing challenges with an unfamiliar environment, such as encountering foreign languages and different cultures, they make adjustments through adaptation and attitudes to the host country for a period of time. Regardless of the language barriers and cultural differences, the participants regarded that the study abroad experience could enhance their language skills, and were excited to learn about different cultures. More importantly, they experienced learning while overcoming various difficulties during the study abroad programmes.

### *6.3.3 Unexpected outcomes: building peer relationships*

There were some unexpected outcomes of studying abroad reflected in the data. From the questionnaire results, it shows that the mean score of making local friends in the host country (D6: mean = 4.14) was higher than the mean score of building closer relationships with the students they went with from the same institution (D5: mean = 4.125) and making international friends from other countries, other than those of the host country (D7: mean = 3.98). This illustrates that the questionnaire respondents regarded that they were more likely to make local friends in the host country than to make international friends from other countries or build closer relationships with their peers from their home countries.



However, the interview findings reflected that many participants, in fact eight out of twelve (N=8), found the exact opposite; that is, that they were more likely to make international friends from other countries and build closer relationships with their peers from their home countries than make local friends in the host country.

The interviewees reported that they were more associated with other international students who were also studying abroad than with the local students who lived in the host countries.

*'It was unexpected. I made more international friends, such as Korean, Thai and Indonesian than local Australian students. It was more difficult to initiate talking to local students than international students. The reason was probably that all the international students lived in the same dormitory floor. Hence, we often joined the same international activities together. Moreover, we (international students) might have more common topics to talk about as we were living in a similar situation as exchange students and as Asians' (Holly).*

This interviewee illustrated that growing up in different cultures governed the study abroad students' social participation, as well as the preference for subjects they liked to talk about in their communication. Another interviewee also agreed with this view and further explained this phenomenon as:

*'Local students liked to go to the pub, but other Asian international students and we (Hong Kong exchange students) would like to travel. Moreover, we (Asian international students) often attended the same lectures of particular modules which were arranged for the international students. Sometimes, we (Asian international students) would even travel together. Therefore, we met more international students than local students' (Hilda).*

She regarded that this result was accounted for by the different interests and the limited modules the exchange students were able to take.

On the other hand, it happened that they had unexpectedly built closer relationships with their peers from their home country. One Mainland Chinese participant reflected that:

*'Since we (peers from the same institution) shared accommodation in the US, it actually provided us with more opportunities to chat than when we were at the home institute. So, we learnt more about each other while we were in the*

*US. Unexpectedly, I got to know our Hong Kong course mates much better and found that we could share with each other so much more. We (Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students) hardly knew each other or hung out together while we were in Hong Kong.' (Mina).*

Interestingly, this Mainland Chinese participant learnt more about her Hong Kong course-mates while she was staying in the US for a few months than while studying in Hong Kong for three years. She appreciated that the study abroad experience helped her to break the previous barrier between the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students.

Yet, one interviewee cautioned that building closer relationships with peers might limit their opportunities to make friends with the local people of the host countries.

*Although we (peers from the same institution) became closer to each other, it can be a barrier to learn to be independent and limit the opportunities to make friends with the local students of the host country because we always acted as a group. (Howard).*

In general, there are two types of unexpected outcome of the short-term study abroad programmes reflected by the interviewees. First, the students associate more with other international students who were also studying abroad than with the local students who lived in the host countries. Second, they had built closer relationships with peers who came from the same institution during the study abroad period. These two outcomes might limit their opportunities to make friends with the local students of the host country. This phenomenon is also reflected in Wiers-Jenssen's (2003:399) study when the Norwegian students studied and lived 'in "ghettos" of students from abroad, which restricted their chances of cross-cultural contact, understanding and integration' with the local students in the host country.

Nevertheless, one needs to be cautious that these interview findings as they serve to illuminate the questionnaire findings and suggest some lines for ongoing work rather than being representative.

## 6.4 Conclusion

This chapter reports the tendencies of students' preferences in selecting the host country, and their perceived value and impacts of short-term study abroad programmes. In terms of their preferences for choosing a host country for studying abroad, most of the respondents, that is over 53%, ranked either the UK or the US as the 'most preferred'. This finding shows that most of the respondents would like to select the major players and the middle players as their target study abroad host countries. It also shows that there was almost twice the number of respondents who chose the UK (N=50) rather than the USA (N=28). Surprisingly, China was selected as the third most preferred host destination by Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students.

Regarding the results of the perceived value of studying abroad, the findings show that the students strongly believed the most beneficial aspect of studying abroad is to facilitate their personal development this is followed by 'understanding other cultures' and 'social development' and 'learning language skills'. However, professional and academic enhancement was less valued by participants. Therefore, it is not surprising that enhancing employment opportunities is the least beneficial aspect that they perceived. It is also found that the respondents regarded that improving their CVs by study abroad experience was not directly related to enhancing their employment opportunities.

Most impacts reported by the study abroad participants were consistent with their perceived values of study abroad programmes. This implies that most of their expectations were matched with their study abroad experiences. The questionnaire results also show that the two most difficult parts of the study abroad programmes were language barriers and overcoming culture differences, while the best part was learning about other cultures or cultural exchange. It is interesting that the study abroad respondents perceived high value of the impact of enhancing proficiency in the host country's language, while they regarded that the language barrier was the most difficult part of their study abroad experience. These results may suggest that learning could be achieved through overcoming difficulties, such

as overcoming language barriers and resolving conflict. The analysis finds that there was a degree of inconsistency between the questionnaire and interview results in terms of the friendships the study abroad participants made in the host countries. Some study abroad interviewees revealed that they unexpectedly made more international friends from other countries and built closer relationships with their peers from their home countries rather than making local friends in the host countries. However, as I have noted these interviews are illuminative rather than representative; they are intended to help us understand some of the survey findings rather than offering further evidence of the extent to which others share these views or not.

The next chapter will present the findings of the issues facing students in deciding whether to study abroad, and makes comparisons of the results among two groups of students: study abroad and non study abroad participants; and Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **ISSUES FACING STUDENTS IN DECIDING TO STUDY ABROAD AND COMPARISONS OF RESULTS**

#### **7.0 Introduction**

Apart from examining students' preferences in selecting their host countries, the perceived value and the impacts of the study abroad programme in Chapter 6, this chapter seeks to answer the second research question (refer to Chapter 1): what issues do the students face in deciding to participate in a study abroad programme? It also sets out to find out whether the hypotheses made in Chapter 4 are true. I hypothesised that there would be differences between the responses of two pairs of participants: study abroad and non study abroad participants, as well as the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students. By comparing the results of these two groups of participants, finding the differences between them is important for explaining the students' decisions to study abroad in terms of their perceived value and impacts of study abroad programmes. Identifying these differences can also provide the audience with different perspectives of looking into student mobility.

#### **7.1 Issues Facing Students in Deciding to Study Abroad**

This section reports the survey and interview findings regarding the issues facing students in deciding to study abroad, including financial concerns, the cultural value of the host countries, security and so on.

By reviewing the literature and analysing the pilot study data, I identified ten main issues facing students in deciding to study abroad. The questionnaire items are namely (C1) ‘Financial concerns’, referring to the financial cost of studying abroad; (C2) ‘Being away from home for too long’, referring to the fact that the student may dislike to be away from home for too long; (C3) ‘Course credit transfer issues’ which is also referred to as ‘credit exemption issues’. All Hong Kong local UGC funded institutions adopt a credit unit system. Students need to fulfil certain credits in order to graduate from their programme. Credit Exemption/Transfer may be granted for modules completed by a student in other institutions or in the Institute, which are considered equivalent or comparable to the modules required by the current programme at the Institute. (C4) ‘Living conditions such as food or habits in the host country’; (C5) ‘Falling behind academically in my home institution’; (C6) ‘Being fairly treated in the host country’; (C7) ‘Suggestions from family or friends’; (C8) ‘Security issues’; (C9) ‘Promotion or encouragement from my current institution’ and (C10) ‘My interests in the cultural value of the host country’. The means and the standard deviations of the issues facing students in deciding to study abroad are listed in descending order in Table 7.1.

*Table 7.1 Means and standard deviations of the issues facing students in deciding to study abroad*

		Mean	Std. Deviation
C1	Financial concerns	4.30	.78230
C10	Interest in the cultural value of the country	4.22	.74735
C8	Security issues	3.95	.91223
C3	Course credit transfer	3.78	.95253
C5	Falling behind academically in home institute	3.72	.90777
C9	Promotion by the current institute	3.62	.90409
C7	Suggestions from family and friends	3.62	.79011
C6	Being fairly treated in the host country	3.44	1.01294
C2	Being away from home for too long	3.19	1.04739
C4	Living conditions	3.18	.98039

The results indicate that financial concerns (C1), with the highest mean score, was the most concerning factor. Interest in the cultural value of the country (C10) was

the second most important factor students would consider in their decision to study abroad, while security issues was the third most concerning factors (C8) for the respondents.

In contrast to the questionnaire results, analysis of the interview data indicates that interest in the cultural value of the country, rather than financial concern, was the most significant factor in selecting the short-term study abroad host country. All interviewees, except the one who obtained the Endeavour scholarship to study in Australia, pointed out that the main reason for choosing the host country was because of their interest in the cultural value of the country.

*‘My first choice for studying abroad was Austria because Austria is full of music culture and history which I have always wanted to learn about.’ (Henry).*

The fact that cost was not the interviewees’ biggest concern may be explained by two reasons. First, the interviewees had already solved the financial problem so that they could study abroad. Second, cost was not the main concern for the students studying in this institute because all interviewees came from the same institute that sponsored a certain portion of the expenses for each exchange student.

*‘Money was not my biggest concern because the institute would sponsor up to HK\$10,000 for each exchange student. Besides, the institute covered all tuition fees while we were studying abroad.’ (Megan).*

This sponsorship encouraged almost 10% of the Year-3 students in this institute to join the exchange programme in 2008. In addition, it is compulsory for each Language student-teacher in Hong Kong to have participated in an immersion programme before he/she graduates. When participating in such a programme, each student only needs to pay about \$HK12,000 per semester, which includes air-tickets and accommodation, in any English-speaking country or about \$HK4,000 per semester to Mainland China for learning Chinese. This means that the home institute would have already sponsored at least 60% of this programme cost. In all, this institute sponsors about 200 language students to participate in immersion programmes each year.

Although security issues were the third most concerning factor in the questionnaire findings, only two interviewees mentioned this issue.

*'The US is a less secure country compared with the UK. Therefore, I would prefer to choose the UK over the US' (Heidi).*

Another interviewee recalled that he had security concerns while he was studying abroad.

*'When I was in the UK, it was about the time when there was a "bomb scare" in one of the UK stations. I was scared at that time, but it was fine after a while. Basically, it was safe in the UK.' (Mason)*

Yet, they did not reflect that it was a significant issue when considering participating in the exchange programme. This may be accounted for by the fact that the countries they went to were mainly developed countries such as the USA, the UK and Australia.

Course credit transfer (C3) was the fourth average highest important issue for consideration, followed by falling behind academically in the home institute (C5) and promotion by the current institute (C9). The interviewees who participated in exchange programmes strongly stressed that the course credit exemption issue was their main concern.

*'I was very concerned about the course credit exemption issue. Even after I came back to Hong Kong, I couldn't be sure whether my course credit obtained during my exchange period in Australia could be transferred back to my home institute. The process to apply for course credit exemption was complicated and was not very promising' (Holly)*

Another interviewee still considered this kind of study abroad experience worthwhile, although she had prior concerns about the course credit exemption issue. She reflected that:

*'Due to the fact that I could only exempt credits for one module from the exchange programme, I needed to study three to four more modules after I came back to Hong Kong in order to catch up with my course. Although it*



*was such a pain and the course credit exemption issue was really my major concern at that time, it is worthwhile to have this kind of study abroad experience.'* (Megan)

Yet, the language students who participated in immersion programmes indicated that the course credit exemption issue and falling behind academically in the home institute was not a major concern because *'the home institute had already arranged most of the modules for the immersion programme such that those course credits could definitely be successfully transferred back home (Megan)*. For this language programme, course credit exemption was promising as students would mostly be exempted from selected modules if they had fulfilled the exemption criteria of individual modules in the host institute. Therefore, the language students worried less about this matter.

Regarding the influence of the promotion from the current institute, one interviewee made the following comment,

*'In our Music department, we had more than fifteen [out of thirty] students participating in exchange programmes. I think we were influenced by our teachers who greatly encouraged us to broaden our horizons by studying abroad for one semester. Therefore, a lot of course mates applied for the exchange programme.'* (Henry)

The results imply that students would be fairly affected by the arrangements and the attitudes of their home institutions, that is, whether the home institution would financially and academically support or encourage students to study abroad does matter. Lastly, the survey findings show that being fairly treated in the host country (C6 mean=3.44) was the third least consideration. Neither being away from home for too long (C2 mean=3.19) nor living conditions (C4 mean=3.17) were significant factors when considering studying abroad.

To sum up, the results show that two major factors, financial concerns and interest in the cultural value of the country, are dominating issues facing students in deciding to study abroad.

## 7.2 Comparisons between Study Abroad and Non Study Abroad Students

In order to investigate whether there were possible differences among the students' perceived value and issues facing students in deciding to study abroad, comparisons of results were made between study abroad and non study abroad participants.

### *7.2.1 Study abroad participants have higher perceived benefits*

To test if there is any significant difference in perceived value between study abroad and non study abroad respondents, independent t-tests were also run for each item of the questionnaire. Table 7.2 shows the comparison of perceived value between the study abroad and non study abroad participants.

Of the perceived value items examined, seven (A3, A4, A8, A9, A10, A13 and A16) were found to show significant differences ( $p < .01$ ) between the study abroad (SA) and non study abroad students (NSA). The results show that the study abroad respondents perceived significantly higher value of three items which related to 'personal development' than the non study abroad respondents. The three were: (1) broadening one's horizons (A3: SA mean = 4.63; NSA mean = 4.31;  $t=2.963$ ,  $df=143$ ,  $p=0.002$  one-tailed), (2) assisting one's personal growth (A4: SA mean = 4.42; NSA mean = 4.07;  $t=2.990$ ,  $df=142$ ,  $p=0.0015$  one-tailed) and (3) providing great opportunities to travel (A8: SA mean = 4.50; NSA mean = 4.09;  $t=3.685$ ,  $df=143$ ,  $p<0.00025$  one-tailed). The study abroad respondents also believed that studying abroad could help them to learn about both the culture of the host country (A9: SA mean = 4.38; NSA mean = 4.06;  $t=2.420$ ,  $df=143$ ,  $p=0.0085$  one-tailed) and different cultures from other international students studying in the host country (A10: SA mean = 3.98; NSA mean = 3.74;  $t=1.755$ ,  $df=143$ ,  $p=0.0405$  one-tailed). The study abroad respondents not only regarded that study abroad could help them enhance their professional skills and knowledge (A13: SA mean = 3.80; NSA mean = 3.44;  $t=2.744$ ,  $df=143$ ,  $p=0.0035$  one-tailed), but they were also more confident that participating in those programmes would

not defer their original academic progress in their home country (A16: SA mean = 2.29; NSA mean = 2.88;  $t=4.078$ ,  $df=142$ ,  $p<0.00025$  one-tailed).

*Table 7.2 Comparisons of perceived value between study abroad and non study abroad participants*

		Study abroad (SA, N=64)	Non study abroad (NSA, N=81)			
		Mean	Mean	T value	df value	Sig. (2-tailed) p-value
<b>Perceived value</b>						
A3	Broaden my horizons	4.63	4.31	2.963	143	.004
A4	Assist my personal growth	4.42	4.07	2.990	142	.003
A8	Provide me with great opportunities to travel	4.50	4.09	3.685	143	.000
A9	Learn about the culture of the host country	4.38	4.06	2.420	143	.017
A10	Learn about different cultures from other international students studying in the host country	3.98	3.74	1.755	143	.081
A13	Enhance my professional skills and knowledge	3.80	3.44	2.744	143	.007
A16	Defer my original academic progress in the home country	2.29	2.88	-4.078	142	.000

Since participating in exchange programmes is both optional and costly, it is not surprising that the students who participated already had a stronger initiative to learn. Usually the modules the students took during the study abroad semester could not be fully exempted and so the students might need to put in more effort to catch up with the credits in Hong Kong after they came back from the exchange host country to their home institute. While the study abroad participants would be more likely to show self-initiative in participating in the programme, they would be more likely to value the exchange experience and be expected to learn more during the exchange period. Hence, it is not surprising that they are more likely to perceive significantly higher value of study abroad programmes in terms of

personal development, learning about different cultures and being less worried about academic matters.

***7.2.2 Being away from home is the significant concern for non study abroad participants***

To test if there is any significant difference in issues facing study abroad and non study abroad participants in deciding to study abroad, independent t-tests were also run for each item of part C of the questionnaire. The only issue with significant difference was ‘being away from home for too long’ (C2: Study Abroad mean = 2.90; Non Study Abroad mean = 3.40;  $t=2.851$ ,  $df=142$ ,  $p=0.0025$  one-tailed). This finding shows that the factor of being away from home for too long was less influential on the study abroad students than on the non study abroad students in deciding to study abroad.

**7.3 Comparisons between Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese Students**

Mainland Chinese students refers to a category of either undergraduate or postgraduate students who were studying in one of the Hong Kong higher education institutions and who reported that their nationality was People’s Republic of China regardless of the length of time they had been living in Hong Kong. In order to examine if there was any significant difference between the Hong Kong (HK) and Mainland Chinese (ML) respondents, independent t-tests were run for each item of the questionnaire. Table 7.3 shows the comparison of items between the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese respondents.

Table 7.3 Comparison of items between the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese respondents

		Hong Kong (HK, N=106)	Mainland Chinese (ML, N=33)	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Mean	value	value	p-value
<b>Perceived values</b>						
A4	Assist my personal growth	4.15	4.45	-2.134	137	.035
A11	Enhance my academic performance	2.85	3.45	-3.795	137	.000
A12	Help me to develop new study habits/skills	3.48	3.78	-1.894	136	.060
A13	Enhance my professional skills and knowledge	3.51	3.79	-1.805	137	.073
A17	Help my future migration opportunities	2.51	2.93	-2.575	136	.011
<b>Consideration for participating in a study abroad programme</b>						
C4	Living conditions	3.10	3.48	-1.947	137	.054
C10	My interest in the cultural value of the host country	4.32	4.09	1.663	137	.099
<b>Influences of study abroad programmes</b>						
		N=39	N=20			
D11	Enhance my academic performance	2.95	3.45	-1.709	57	.093

**7.3.1 Different objectives: Personal development vs. professional and academic enhancement**

Of the perceived value of studying abroad, the views of the Mainland Chinese students are found to be significantly different ( $p < .01$ ) from those of the Hong Kong students regarding five items (A4, A11, A12, A13 and A17).

The results of three items: enhancing academic performance (A11: HK mean = 2.85; ML mean = 3.45;  $t=3.795$ ,  $df=137$ ,  $p=0.0175$  one-tailed), helping to develop

new study habits/skills (A12: HK mean = 3.48; ML mean = 3.78;  $t=1.894$ ,  $df=137$ ,  $p<0.00025$  one-tailed) and enhancing professional skills and knowledge (A13: HK mean = 3.51; ML mean = 3.79;  $t=1.805$ ,  $df=137$ ,  $p=0.0365$  one-tailed), show that the Mainland Chinese students perceived significantly higher academic and professional value of study abroad programmes than did the Hong Kong students. As per their higher expectations of academic performance, the Mainland Chinese study abroad participants regarded that study abroad programmes had a greater influence on enhancing their academic performance than did the Hong Kong study abroad participants after they had participated in those programmes (D11: HK mean = 2.95; ML mean = 3.45;  $t=1.709$ ,  $df=57$ ,  $p=0.0465$  one-tailed). These findings may suggest that the Mainland Chinese students would pay more attention to the academic or professional benefits than the Hong Kong students. These differences are also reflected in the interview findings. One Mainland Chinese interviewee regarded that one drawback of studying abroad was that *'the participants might shift their focus from studying or enhancing their language to travelling'* (Mina). The attitude of the Hong Kong students towards exchange programmes tended to emphasize less the academic benefits. As one Hong Kong interviewee expressed, *'It's (the exchange period) like a holiday'* (Hugo). This is probably accounted for by the fact that the Mainland Chinese students were usually brought up under a learning culture with a stronger emphasis on academic achievement. One Mainland Chinese interviewee pointed out the difference between Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students:

*'Unlike Hong Kong students, we (Mainland Chinese students) would not have part-time or summer jobs while we were still studying at school or even in college. It is because we (Mainland Chinese students) still need to study during weekends and even summer vacation.'* (Mina).

When the interviewees were asked to reflect on *'their most impressive experience during the study abroad programme'*, the results show that students from different places of origin had different foci in terms of those experiences. All five Mainland Chinese interviewees emphasized their positive academic influence, including both language enhancement and new study skills or habits, from the study abroad programme more than the excitement of travel. For example:

*'I was deeply influenced by the reading culture in the UK. Wherever I was travelling, there was always someone reading on the bus or train. So, I also started reading while I was travelling. I have even kept this reading habit since I've come back to Hong Kong. It was the most impressive experience.'*  
(Mina)

In addition, four Mainland Chinese interviewees reported that they had kept employing the new study habits or skills learnt from studying abroad, while only one Hong Kong interviewee expressed that she would like to do so. On the other hand, only four out of the seven Hong Kong interviewees agreed that their language of the host country was enhanced. This finding may echo the results of a recent study on ERASMUS students that involved various European countries (Bracht et al., 2006). The results show that former ERASMUS students from Central and Eastern European countries, which were less economically or academically advanced, regarded that they had more academic benefits and professional impact during the study abroad period than those former students from Western European countries (Bracht et al., 2006).

The questionnaire results show that the Mainland Chinese students perceived higher value of assisting personal growth (A4: HK mean = 4.15; ML mean = 4.45;  $t=2.134$ ,  $df=137$ ,  $p=0.00175$  one-tailed) than the Hong Kong students, whereas the interview findings showed that all interviewees were excited about their personal growth. The interview findings could not tell whether the Hong Kong or Mainland Chinese students would value this benefit more. Nonetheless, the interview results reflect that all seven Hong Kong interviewees showed more excitement about their personal growth than about their academic or language enhancement in the interviews. One Hong Kong interviewee recalled her most impressive experience during her study abroad period as:

*'My two peers and I were lost once while we were travelling. The place was so cold and we were so hungry. I did not know the way to get back. But I just kept encouraging my peers and trying different paths until we found our way out. It was the most impressive event because finally we had solved the problems on our own.'* (Hilda)

Although the questionnaire results show that the Mainland Chinese students perceived higher value in both the aspects of enhancing academic performance

and assisting personal growth, the interview findings illustrate that the attitudes between the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students towards study abroad programmes vary. Each group of students seemed to be motivated by different priorities and foci: academic objectives come first for the Mainland Chinese students whereas personal growth is more important to Hong Kong students. This result echoes recent studies (Gao, 2008; Li, 2006) showing that the first perceived benefits of the Mainland Chinese students to study abroad were economic return and academic achievement for acquiring social mobility in the future.

### ***7.3.2 Different considerations: Interest in cultural value vs. living conditions***

With regard to the issues facing the students in deciding to study abroad, the Mainland Chinese students were found to be significantly different ( $p < .01$ ) from the Hong Kong students regarding two items: 'living conditions' (C4: HK mean = 3.10; ML mean = 3.48;  $t=1.947$ ,  $df=137$ ,  $p=0.028$  one-tailed) and 'interest in the cultural value of the host country' (C10: HK mean = 4.32; ML mean = 4.09;  $t=1.663$ ,  $df=137$ ,  $p=0.0495$  one-tailed). These results suggest that the Hong Kong students would take more interest in the cultural value of the host country when deciding to study abroad than the Mainland Chinese students. In reverse, the Mainland Chinese would consider more the living conditions than the Hong Kong students. However, there was no evidence found in the interviews to support these findings.

### ***7.3.3 Different preferences of host country: UK vs. US***

The rankings of the most preferred host country between the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students are very different. The questionnaire results show that the Hong Kong students preferred to choose the UK, while the Mainland Chinese students preferred to choose the USA as the study abroad host country. This result echoes the findings of a study of the US Institute of International Education (IIE, 2009) showing that Hong Kong had only 0.5% growth to 8,329 student enrollments in the US during 2008/09 while China was the second leading place of origin for international student enrollments, has and had a large 21% increase



in international enrollments to 98,235 students from the previous year. This suggests that Mainland Chinese students might have more interest in studying in the US than Hong Kong students in general.

In order to examine if there is any relationship between the choice of the UK and the USA as the most preferred host country among Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students, chi-square tests were performed. The number and distribution of selecting the UK and the USA as the most preferred host countries among the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students is shown in Table 7.4. The results show that there is a relationship between the tendency towards choosing the UK and the USA as the most preferred host countries among the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students ( $\chi^2 = 9.135$ ,  $DF=1$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ).

*Table 7.4 The number and distribution of selecting the UK and the USA as the most preferred host countries among the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students*

	Number of Hong Kong students (N=106)	Number of Mainland Chinese students (N=33)	Total
UK	42	8	50
USA	14	13	27

*Pearson Chi-square value = 9.135, DF=1, p = 0.003*

This phenomenon might be explained by several reasons. Firstly, Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students are brought up with two different cultures. One Mainland Chinese interviewee accounted for more Mainland Chinese preferring to study in the US by the fact that they ‘*learned US culture more often through media than UK culture in China*’ (Maggie). One Hong Kong student supported this suggestion by commenting that, ‘*Most Mainland Chinese are being taught US English instead of British English. This is different from Hong Kong students*’ (Hilda). As the ‘interest in the cultural value of the country’ was considered as the most critical factor in deciding to study abroad by the respondents, the Hong Kong students regarded that they ‘*choose the UK because it is an old country with rich cultural value*’ (Heidi). The UK is thought to have possessed ‘*richer cultural*

*value because of its long history. This value is particularly attractive to the language students' (Heidi).* Another Hongkonger further supported this view:

*'The US is only about 200 years old while the UK has so much more history and cultural value' (Hilda).*

Secondly, degrees of familiarity with different countries and economical motives may influence the respondents' preferences of host country. Another explanation for this phenomenon was suggested by a Hong Kong interviewee as:

*'Hong Kong students feel more familiar with the UK education system since Hong Kong was a British colony, while the Mainland Chinese prefer to study in the United States because they always believe the United States is a more advanced country' (Hugo).*

One Mainland Chinese interviewee, Megan, also pointed to the difference between the UK and the US stating that:

*'The UK has a rich history while the US is a more advanced and capitalist country'.*

During the 1950s with the economic and social plan 'the Great Leap Forward' of the People's Republic of China (PRC), Chairman Mao Zedong created a slogan 'Overtake Britain, catch up to the United States' (超英趕美) aiming to bring the nation quickly into the forefront of economic development. With this background, one Hong Kong student proposed that:

*'Since then [1950s], the Mainland Chinese might think that China has to overtake Britain before catching up to the United States. This implies that the United States is regarded as a more advanced country in Mainland Chinese minds' (Hugo).*

Undoubtedly, the PRC government targeted the US as a goal for its economic development. Since academic and professional development was a major emphasis for the Mainland Chinese participants to study abroad, it explains why they would prefer to study in a more economically advanced country – the United States, to enhance their academic and professional development so as to

eventually seek better jobs. This is in line with Tremblay's (2003) comments that the choice of students to go to countries with a language other than their mother tongue is often driven by motives of an economic nature.

Thirdly, historical reasons further developing social networks is another reason why Hong Kong students are fonder of choosing the UK as a host destination for study.

*'My first priority was the UK since my brother was living in the UK.'* (Holly)

Another Hong Kong interviewee also revealed that:

*'My previous preference of host country was the UK because my cousin was studying in the UK. Unfortunately, I wasn't accepted because I failed the entrance test.'* (Howard).

Interestingly, this result echoes the survey conducted by the Hong Kong SAR government in 2003, which shows that more persons aged 15 and over who intended to study in higher education outside Hong Kong between 2003-2006 would choose the UK (20.9%) than those who would choose the US (20.2%) as their host destination (HKSAR, 2004). This finding is not surprising as Hong Kong is a former British colony; thus, many Hong Kong people, especially the former British public servants, would have studied in or migrated to the UK previously. Hence, many Hong Kong students may still have strong links to and social network ties in the UK.

## 7.4 Conclusion

This chapter delineates the findings of the issues facing students in deciding to study abroad, and compares the results between the study abroad and non study abroad participants as well as the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students.

Financial concerns appeared as *the* most important factor influencing the decision as to whether they should study abroad in the survey findings. This was followed

by the interest in the cultural value of the host country, and security issues. Living conditions was the least important issue facing students in deciding to study abroad. However, the interviews showed that financial factors were not the interviewees' biggest concern in deciding to participate in exchange or immersion programmes as their home institute largely subsidises these programmes. The interview results also showed that the issues facing students in deciding to study abroad differ according to different conditions such as course credit transfer and promotion from the home institute provided by different institutions.

The comparison results show that the study abroad respondents perceive significantly higher value of the study abroad benefits than non study abroad respondents in terms of personal growth, understanding cultures and social development as well as professional and academic enhancement. In addition, study abroad respondents would worry less about deferring their original academic progress in the home country. Regarding the issue facing students in deciding to study abroad, the results also reflect that the only difference between study abroad and non study abroad students is that the non study abroad respondents showed greater concern about being away from home for too long compared with the study abroad students.

Comparative analysis shows that there were several aspects of differences between the Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students. Firstly, the Mainland Chinese students cared more about their professional and academic enhancement, while the Hong Kong students in the survey tended to pay more attention to personal growth. Secondly, the Mainland Chinese students showed more concern for their living conditions whilst on the study abroad programme, while the Hong Kong respondents would have more interest in the cultural value of the host country. Thirdly, among the host countries, the Mainland Chinese would be more likely to rank the US as the 'most preferred' study abroad country, while the Hong Kong students would tend to rank the UK as the 'most preferred' study abroad host country. These differences are accounted for by the fact that Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong Chinese possess different social, cultural, historical and political experiences, as Hong Kong was ruled by the British for 100 years since

the nineteenth century (Gao, 2008). Despite their sharing the same ethnicity and a similar cultural heritage, it is problematic to homogenize their views of student mobility.

This chapter has analysed the issues facing students in deciding to study abroad. It has also drawn attention to the different views of study abroad and non study abroad participants, as well as those of Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students. The next chapter will examine the students' perceptions and the impacts of study abroad programmes in attaining a global perspective.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **FRAMING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTAINMENT OF A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE FOR PERSONAL, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

#### **8.0 Introduction**

This chapter aims to provide insights into the students' perceptions of the impacts of study abroad programmes on their competence in *attaining a global perspective*. It frames the students' perceptions of and the importance of attaining a global perspective through the programmes. In this chapter, I shall answer the third research question (refer to Chapter 1): what are the students' views on attaining a global perspective through study abroad programmes? In particular, these answers are further addressed through the following sub-questions (refer to Chapter 4):

- (i) What are the students' understandings of 'global perspective' by participating in those programmes in the context of globalisation?
- (ii) How do they value global perspective through their views of globalisation?
- (iii) Do they think that attaining a global perspective is important to their personal, cultural and social development, and in what ways?
- (iv) Have they changed their perceived values after returning from the study abroad programme?

8.1 Students’ Understandings of ‘Global Perspective’

To answer this question, I draw upon the students’ understanding of global perspective from the results of two questions in the survey. The first question is ‘Do the respondents think it is important to integrate a ‘global perspective’ into the education system they are in?’ (Refer to question B10) and the second one is ‘Do the respondents think that they have an idea of the concept of global perspective?’ (Refer to question B11). The means and the standard deviations of questions B11 and B10 are shown in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1 Means and standard deviations of understanding global perspective

	I think ‘global perspective’ is important to	N=146	Mean	Std. Deviation
B10	Be integrated into the education system I am in.	146	3.42	0.75
B11	I have no idea what ‘global perspective’ is.	144	2.90	1.03

The result of B11 (mean=2.90) shows that a certain number of students stated they had no idea of what a ‘global perspective’ actually meant. Yet, the mean score of B10 (mean = 3.42) reflects that the respondents held between a neutral/undecided view and a positive attitude towards integrating ‘global perspective’ into the education system. The questionnaire findings suggest that although the respondents might hold different views about, or even were not certain of, the meaning of ‘global perspective’, they nevertheless regarded it would have a positive influence if it could be integrated into their existing education system. This view is supported by the interview findings.

*‘A global perspective is not limited to the business sector. We often talk about globalisation including education curricula. Globalisation drives us to learn from foreign education systems so that it can improve our system. It also teaches our students that the competition is so great that they are not only competing with the locals but also others globally.’ (Megan)*

As a student-teacher, this interviewee reflected that a global perspective is embodied in the notion of globalisation. The effects of the perspective are not only on the operation of the business sector, but also improve the education system and its curriculum development by comparing it with other systems. More importantly, the students' responses implied that attaining a global perspective could enrich their personal development, enabling them to respond to different challenges and opportunities. It is important to recognise that the students embraced a positive view of attaining a global perspective although they may not completely understand its meaning.

## **8.2 How do They Value Global Perspective through Their Views of Globalisation?**

Since the data suggests that a global perspective is embodied in what it means to talk about globalisation, understanding the students' concern with globalisation may help to gain further and deeper insight into their idea of what global perspective means. Therefore, the question 'What do you understand by globalisation?' was asked during the interviews. The students gave various answers to this question. By analysing the data, I contextualise three main dimensions of globalisation that the students thought it should entail. They are the economic, cultural/social and technological dimensions, and draws from the literature outlined in Chapter 2.

### ***8.2.1 Economic, cultural/social and technological dimensions***

According to the analysis of the interviewees' responses, globalisation is generally referred to in an interrelated coherence of economic, cultural and social dimensions (Rizvi, 2005a). The following quotation of an interviewee's view described this notion of globalisation:

*'Globalisation means 'borderless' to me. For example, it's like a 'world factory'. A pair of shoes selling in Hong Kong may be made in India and the raw materials may come from Africa. The product is sourced in one place, made and delivered in different places.'* (Howard)



Howard linked the characteristic of borderless to the meaning of globalisation. He used the example of a 'world factory' involving manufacturing procedures as an illustration of the economic dimension of globalisation.

*'People need to work together, to be able to develop relationships and cooperate with global partners around the world in order to manufacture products at competitive prices.'* (Howard)

In this quote, this participant described the need for cooperation between people, which refers to the cultural/social dimension of globalisation being interrelated with its economic dimensions.

*'The world is flat [in that economic, cultural/social and technological dimensions are embedded]. The Internet has accelerated globalisation. And your friends have become globalised. You would have friends around the world now, not just limited to Hong Kong and Chinese friends. By looking into different cultures around the world, it is regarded as a result of globalisation.'* (Howard)

Howard further mentioned the role of the Internet in globalisation; in other words the technological dimension of globalisation (Castells, 2000) creating considerable coherence to the cultural/social and the economic dimensions of globalisation.

The interviewees often referred to globalisation as relating to the imperatives of the global economy, the differences of individual societies or social systems, and a culture of consumption:

*'It seems to me that the meaning of globalisation is to be able to share so many things such as merchandise and transportation with different societies and community systems.'* (Hilda)

Enhancing cultural exchange and opportunities for economic activities were the two major benefits mentioned by the interviewees that could be derived from globalisation.

*'I think globalisation can enhance more and more cultural exchange and economic activities. Eventually, peoples' concepts will be interconnected and merge into one.'* (Maggie)

It is also widely believed that globalisation could enhance economic development by increasing connections among countries through new technologies.

*'Globalisation enhances economic development and academic exchange. New technologies shorten our distance geographically and provide tighter connections among nations.'* (Mina)

Regarding the technological dimension of globalisation, one interviewee made the following reflection.

*'The Internet has sped up the process of globalisation. Living in an advanced city, it is possible for us to browse the Internet and learn about various instances around the globe. As long as I type in the keyword and press the 'search' button, I am able to search for any information. I think it is the biggest influence of globalisation.'* (Henry)

This finding is in line with Castells' (2000: 21) comment; that the Internet is regarded as an 'instrumental tool of management of new forms of life, including the building of on-line communities of support and collective learning'.

Another interviewee further explained the benefit of the Internet; that through electronic media, information can be easily obtained by students for making decisions for their further study.

*'On the other hand, mass information interflows so easily through the Internet. It actually helped me when considering further study abroad.'* (Maggie)

Both participants deeply appreciate the convenience of global learning that was brought by the rapidly-spreading Internet culture. They regarded that globalisation is the result of this new technology. It shows that the Internet and electronic media hypertext have not only become a vehicle of sharing cultural codes (Castells, 2000), but it is still valid that the revolution in new technologies, such as telephone, television, computers, satellites, and air transportation, have established instantaneous world-wide links both physically and virtually,

significantly altering the nature of communication (Held & McGrew, 1998). In this respect, globalisation embodies the economic, cultural/social and technological dimensions that drive students' understandings of global perspective through the study abroad programmes.

### **8.2.2 Concerns of globalisation**

Regardless of all the benefits brought by globalisation, it is not without its concerns. Some interviewees pointed out that globalisation increased inequality between developing and developed countries. They also implied that globalisation not only enhances cultural exchange, but also leads to homogenised culture, in particular in consumer culture.

*'I don't know much about the issue of globalisation. But what we have in Hong Kong can also be found in other countries. We (Hong Kong and other countries) have so many things in common. For example, the shops we have in Hong Kong are also seen in other countries and the things we can buy in Hong Kong can also be bought in other countries.'* (Hilda)

This participant seemed to expect that there would be an increasing convergence of the world's diverse cultures and a process of becoming 'more uniform and standardised through technological, cultural and commercial synchronisation' (Rizvi, 2005b: 337). Another interviewee raised an issue concerning the increasingly homogenised consumer culture that might lead to assimilating cultures.

*'Products can often be found everywhere around the world. However, globalisation doesn't mean assimilation. Each individual should recognise different cultures, yet maintain his or her culture at the same time.'* (Mina)

This interviewee was aware of the importance of recognizing the existence of different cultures and advocated that they should be preserved. This finding echoes Rizvi and Lingard's (2010) caution; that it is not always easy to reconcile differences in cultures as our consumerist tastes converge and our cultural traditions come into contact with others.

Because of the different pace of economic and social progress between developing and developed countries, some interviewees were aware of their concerns about inequality after they had participated in the study abroad programme. They pointed out that this is a serious issue brought to developing countries by globalization; a phenomenon advocated by developed countries.

*'I studied a subject in school which described "globalisation" as actually caused a lot of developing countries getting rid off by the developed countries. In general, the word "globalisation" gives me an impression of "unfairness"'. (Mina)*

Mina recalled that when she was studying in Mainland China, she was taught that globalisation was disadvantaging the developing countries. This view is widely discussed as a result of rising for-profit providers of various goods and services from developed countries who are taking advantage of the developing countries. As a consequence, the increasing exclusion of less developed countries and their citizens from the benefits of globalisation is evidenced (Ryan, 2008). She continued that:

*'Globalisation has become Westernisation. It makes me aware of the needs of maintaining our own culture and identity as well as national competitiveness so that I wouldn't lose myself [in being exposed to the host country while studying abroad]'. (Mina)*

She regarded that we should retain our own cultures instead of blindly following the globalising trend. This response echoes the comments that 'globalisation from below' involves 'the resistance of power differentials and the making of new identities with their corresponding fields of difference' (Rizvi & Lingard 2010:168).

The participants' concepts and underlying ideas of globalisation revealed in this section will provide a backdrop for the audience for reflecting and discussing the findings in Section 8.3 and 8.4.

**8.3 Do They Think that Attaining a Global Perspective is Important to Their personal, Cultural and Social Development and in What Ways?**

I further draw insights from the data analysis regarding how the students value global perspective. Interestingly, the insights explicated in Section 8.1 suggest that the students might be aware of a vague meaning of ‘global perspective’ but they tended to hold a positive attitude towards the importance of integrating global perspective into their existing education system. In fact, the students realised the idea of global perspective embodied in the benefits and concerns of globalisation explicated in Section 8.2. In this section, I use the students’ responses to the question, ‘Why do they think it is important to attain a global perspective?’ to explore possible answers. Table 8.2 lists in descending order the means and standard deviations of the surveyed students’ responses to questions regarding the importance of attaining a global perspective.

*Table 8.2 Means and standard deviations of items for the importance of attaining a global perspective (in descending order).*

	I think ‘global perspective’ is important to	N=146	Mean	Std. Deviation
B9	Enable individuals to react to the rapid pace of global change	146	3.7397	.67522
B6	Enable individuals to compete in the current world	145	3.6828	.75188
B1	Improve international relations	146	3.5822	.68236
B4	Acknowledge my global citizenship	146	3.5822	.82007
B8	Enhance international economic development	146	3.4726	.88040
B3	Solve environmental problems	145	3.4069	.79492
B2	Solve conflicts between countries	146	3.3356	.74535
B5	Advance the economic growth of my own country	146	3.2740	.80960
B7	Improve social inequality	146	3.2192	.92097

With 5 for ‘the most important’ down to 1 for ‘the least important’, the mean scores of most of the items in this part of the questionnaire generally lay between 3 and 4. This shows that the respondents were prone to choose between values of ‘undecided’ or ‘neutral’ and ‘agree’. These results further suggest that the

respondents did not hold strong views regarding the importance of attaining a global perspective. However, the students expressed their views on ‘what are the impacts on you from globalisation?’ and ‘how do they affect you?’ in the interviews, indicating the value of attaining a global perspective through the study abroad programmes. I can then begin to see that the students only valued having a global perspective in the economic and cultural/social dimensions of globalisation because of their limited understandings of global perspective. Further insights into valuing global perspective can focus on enhancement of personal development in the economic dimension and justification of moral and political global connectivity in the cultural/social dimension of globalisation.

### ***8.3.1 Enhancing personal development***

Among the 9 items relating to the importance of attaining a global perspective, the mean scores of enabling individuals to react to the rapid pace of global change (B9), and enabling individuals to compete in the current world (B6), are the highest. This implies that enhancing individual competence during global change is regarded as the most important reason for attaining a global perspective. Both of these two items are related to enhancing competence in the rapidly changing global economy. I conceptualise them as falling within the category of ‘enhancing personal development’.

From the interviewees’ perspective, the following student reflected that attaining a global perspective is important for his study.

*‘I need to consider a global perspective and refer to materials from different countries in order to fulfil my own study. It is important as it impacts my way of study.’ (Howard).*

Another interviewee illustrated that attaining a global perspective, in particular learning news and current issues of other countries, was essential for planning her future career.

*‘Learning about news and current issues in other countries is also necessary for planning for further study or a future career.’ (Maggie)*

This further illustrates that the students were aware of global change and recognised the importance for each individual to react and adapt to this change. It echoes an American national survey which shows that students themselves are also concerned about whether they have obtained adequate global competence and are aware of the needs to compete in the global economy (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2007).

### ***8.3.2 Justification of moral and political global connectivity***

With the same mean score, improving international relations (B1) and acknowledging one's global citizenship (B4), come third regarding the importance of attaining a global perspective, while the lowest mean scores were for improving social inequality (B7), followed by advancing economic growth of one's own country (B5), solving conflicts between countries (B2) and solving environmental problems (B3). These results reflect that, on the one hand, the respondents considered that obtaining a global perspective was important for improving international relations and recognizing their role as global citizens. Interestingly, on the other hand, they believed that attaining a global perspective had little influence on solving global problems such as social inequality, environmental problems and conflicts between countries.

To further understand these survey findings, I sought to see if the interview data might help to elucidate these phenomena. One possible explanation is that when the respondents were answering the questionnaires, they were responding to three different levels: individual, national and international, of global connectivity, entwined with a global perspective. In the interviews, some interviewees suggested that some impacts were only limited to an individual level.

*'I think an individual's strength is limited. Individual attainment of a global perspective cannot influence international affairs which rely on the effort from a national level.'* (Holly)

This participant regarded that an individual could not improve international relations, which relied on the national level. Regarding the issues of international relations and resolving conflicts, there were two different points of view mentioned by the interviewees.

*'It's not up to us to resolve conflicts. I don't think obtaining my own global perspective is significant enough to be able to resolve conflicts or improve international relations.'* (Heidi)

This interviewee believed that individual attainment of a global perspective and effort were insignificant and could not improve international relations. The following interviewee further confirmed this view:

*'I think attaining a global perspective is limited to an individual level. Unless you were a president, it's very difficult for an individual's global perspective or effort to change one nation's perspective or international relations. I think an individual can't be very influential.'* (Maggie)

Based on one interviewee's concept of globalisation, she pointed out that one effect of it would be to entrench social inequality between developed and developing countries.

*'Globalisation only increases social inequality between developed and developing countries.'* (Mina)

This view echoes the findings reported in Section 8.2.2; that globalisation was disadvantaging the developing countries. These findings suggested that she regarded social inequality as an international issue among countries. Therefore, it is not surprising that she considered that attaining a global perspective provided little help in improving social inequality because these issues might be regarded at a national or international level, whilst an individual's attainment of global perspective would have little influence on it.

However, one interviewee argued that social conflicts could be resolved by reducing cultural difference through globalisation,



*'While there are cultural differences among different nations, globalisation minimises these differences through technology development. It reduces cultural differences and social conflicts.'* (Henry)

Henry in emphasizing that globalisation could minimise cultural differences and social conflicts through technology suggested that new technology has not only provided information networks, but also become a critical tool for building social networks and the means of resolving conflicts. Although Henry referred to issues of cultural differences and social conflicts, he believed that attaining a global perspective could enhance mutual understanding between cultures and hence it is possible to reduce conflicts.

From the interview data, it is suggested that the respondents probably regarded that individual attainment of a global perspective as important for enabling individuals to react to the rapid pace of global change (B9), enabling individuals to compete in the current world (B6), and acknowledging one's global citizenship (B4) because those items were at an individual level, while it was less important for improving social inequality (B7), solving conflicts between countries (B2) and solving environmental problems (B3) as these were mostly at the national or international levels and therefore beyond the agency of an individual.

Whilst these results seem to be contradictory, they may also be explained from two perspectives. First, according to their perception of globalisation discussed in Section 8.2.1, global perspectives may involve three dimensions: economic, cultural/social and technological dimensions. We might understand that the participants regarded that attaining a global perspective was more important for the economic dimension, including enabling individuals to react to the rapid pace of global change (B9) and enabling individuals to compete in the current world (B6), than to the social/cultural dimensions that include improving social inequality (B7), solving conflicts between countries (B2) and solving environmental problems (B3). These findings echo Cheah and Robbins' (1998) comments; that within the framework of the contemporary market-based practices of international education, the study abroad students whose participation is an

economic exchange are less concerned with the moral and political dimensions of global interconnectivity than with education’s strategic economic possibilities.

Second, we might understand that the participants perceived that attaining a global perspective was more important to improving issues at an individual level than to those at national and international levels.

**8.4 Have They Changed Their Perceived Values after Returning from the Study Abroad Programme?**

To interpret further insights of the data analysis, I tested whether there was any relationship between study abroad experiences and the perception of importance in attaining a global perspective. Hence, independent t-tests were run for each item of the questionnaire between the study abroad and non study abroad participants. Table 8.3 shows the comparison of items of importance of attaining a global perspective between the study abroad and non study abroad participants with significant differences.

*Table 8.3 Comparison of items of importance of attaining a global perspective between study abroad and non study abroad participants with significant differences*

		Study abroad (SA, N=64)	Non study abroad (NSA, N=81)	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Mean	value	value	value
Global perspective						
B1	Improve international relations	3.75	3.47	2.547	143	.012
B3	Solve environmental problems	3.57	3.30	2.101	142	.037
B7	Improve social inequality	3.42	3.07	2.297	143	.023

In the interviews I explored the relationship between study abroad programmes and their influence on their views of global perspective by asking the interviewees to reflect on, (1) did your study abroad experience affect your views about globalisation? (2) what influenced their view, and how did it impact on them?

#### ***8.4.1 More emphasis on moral or political dimensions of global connectivity***

In the survey, the study abroad respondents were found to be significantly different from the non study abroad respondents regarding the importance of attaining a global perspective for three items (refer to Table 8.3): improving international relations (B1: SA mean = 3.75; NSA mean = 3.47;  $t=2.547$ ,  $df=143$ ,  $p=0.006$  one-tailed), solving environmental problems (B3: SA mean = 3.57; NSA mean = 3.30;  $t=2.101$ ,  $df=142$ ,  $p=0.0185$  one-tailed) and improving social inequality (B7: SA mean = 3.42; NSA mean = 3.07;  $t=2.297$ ,  $df=143$ ,  $p=0.0115$  one-tailed). These results show that the study abroad respondents' perception of the importance of attaining a global perspective was significantly higher in the moral and political dimensions of global connectivity than that of the non study abroad respondents.

After participating in a study abroad programme, one interviewee regarded that she had deeper feelings about having experienced being a global citizen.

*'During my study abroad period, I was living in the UK and did some travelling in France. I have been to some places in France and the UK. I found that the qualities of their people seem to vary. Even though I had some expectations before I went, I felt very different after I had been there. I used to think that British were cool and probably looked down on Chinese. Actually, some people were quite cool while some really wanted to help me. Without actually being there, I could not experience what globalisation really meant. I had experienced more about global citizenship after the programme.'* (Heidi)

This interviewee further explained that the study abroad programme provided her with an opportunity to understand different cultures and make friends with people of different ethnicities so as to improve relationships between different people.

*'When we were studying abroad, we learned to get along with people of other ethnicities. If we could become friends afterward, we are actually advancing globalisation because we have mutual influence on each other.'* (Heidi)

These findings are consistent with the survey findings that the study abroad respondents valued the importance of attaining a global perspective to improve international relations significantly more than the non study abroad respondents. Another example illustrates this point.

*'Before I went to the US, I had some certain preconceptions about Americans and British. After I had my study abroad experience, I realised that each individual is unique and should not be expected to belong to a certain national stereotype. I think that is the result of globalisation. Without globalisation, we might expect each individual would belong to a certain stereotype. For example, people used to expect Chinese as a race to embrace collectivism. However, globalisation enables us to understand each other more culturally so that it can prevent us from being assertive about certain cultures.'* (Mason)

Mason recalled how his misconceptions about American and British cultures had changed over the period when he studied abroad. His observation was in line with Rizvi and Lingard's (2010:164) comment; that the process of cultural globalisation affects the ways that people think about 'their identity, their sense of belonging, and the cultural spaces they inhabit'. However, Mason was well aware that the perceptions of different cultures might also lead to misunderstanding. He suggested that enhancing understanding of different cultures might help solve cultural conflicts. This result is consistent with many studies which claim that study abroad participants showed higher levels of international concern, cross-cultural interest and awareness than non study abroad students (Carlson & Widaman, 1988; Mapp et al, 2007)

By recognizing the different impacts of globalisation on developed and developing countries, a study abroad participant advocated that developed countries should take up the responsibility to help underdeveloped countries while they were experiencing the economic affects of globalisation.

*'When I was studying abroad, a worker asked me what I thought about the impact of globalisation on the developing countries. What I think is that globalisation benefits most of the developed countries. Therefore, those developed countries have the responsibility to help other countries. Although globalisation has benefited many countries economically, all countries should also help each other politically.'* (Hannah)

This comment illustrates that this participant saw herself more as a global citizen by having the capacity to reflect on the impact of globalisation during her participation in the study abroad programme. This finding fits the purpose of international education which aims to increase intercultural knowledge and to enhance the level of international cooperation (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010:169).

#### ***8.4.2 Increase appreciation of different cultures***

All of the interviewees reflected that they had an increased appreciation of, and a growing desire to learn about, different cultures after they had studied abroad.

*'I have become more interested in British culture. Similarly, I believe the British grew more interested in learning about our culture. People become more willing to communicate with each other. Thus, it can reduce our cultural differences.'* (Heidi)

Attaining a global perspective not only aroused her interest in understanding other cultures but also helped the participant to rethink her own role and identity.

*'Studying abroad has helped me understand Western culture better and clear up some of my puzzlement or misunderstanding of the culture. People say that Westerners and Asians are very different, but I found that we actually have a lot in common and don't have much difference. I think our basic human principles are pretty much the same.'* (Megan)

Both participants agreed that their study abroad programmes helped them increase mutual understanding of different cultures so as to make them feel their prior perceptions of cultural differences had been reduced. Another participant illustrated an example of resolving cultural misunderstanding by communicating face-to-face with different ethnicities.

*'I think one of the influences of globalisation is that the whole world is speaking English now. When I visited a primary school in Belfast, although some pupils knew there was a place called China, they would ask me whether everyone speaks Beijing English in China. I was surprised that the students thought everyone was speaking English in their own country. But I was glad that I had a chance to help them get to know more about Chinese [living culture].'* (Mason)

This interviewee regarded that globalisation has a mutual influence between the study abroad participants and the people they encountered in the host countries.

#### ***8.4.3 Gaining a deeper understanding of globalisation***

During the period of living abroad, the students reflected that they gained a deeper understanding of globalisation after participation in a study abroad programme. The interviewees regarded that study abroad programmes were essential to experience globalisation because *'knowing is different from seeing different cultures with your own eyes. Personal experiencing makes the term "globalisation" authentic'* (Hilda). Another interviewee noted that:

*'Although I thought about what the UK was like before I studied abroad, it's nothing like the real experience of the culture during the immersion period.'* (Maggie)

Participating in a study abroad programme makes students aware of the dynamics of globalisation. It further stimulates students to think expansively about the possibilities of being able to work globally in the future.

*'After I participated in the exchange programme, I thought more about the definition of 'globalisation' and how it might affect my development. Now, I no longer confine my future career to Hong Kong. It would not be a problem if I had a chance to work as a teacher in other countries. That's what globalisation is about, right?'* (Howard)

The following findings show that the degree of impact from study abroad programmes is not necessarily dependent on the duration of the programme, but is dependent on its purpose and the people the participant encounters.

*'The most impressive study abroad experience is when I joined a programme in Vietnam. Although I only went to Vietnam for a volunteer programme for two months, it gave me the opportunity to encounter other cultures and people, and to feel what globalisation is all about.'* (Hannah)

This participant, who also participated in an immersion programme for one semester, showed that even a short-term volunteer programme could have a big impact on students.

Although some interviewees found that there was little influence from the study abroad programme, they suggested that this phenomenon might be only compatible in developed countries and would be different if they studied in different host countries.

*'My studying abroad experience didn't affect my view of globalisation much. I guess it's because I went to a developed country just like Hong Kong.'*  
(Henry)

This interviewee pointed out that there were different impacts of globalisation on developed and developing countries. Another interviewee further reflected this realisation.

*'After having participated in exchange and immersion programmes, I deeply experienced how people live in another part of the world. I used to think that foreign living models and ways of thinking were very different from ours. But actually, there are not many differences. Yet, I only meant those living in developed countries. I believe that it would be a completely different story for those living in developing countries. I probably would not experience as much about globalisation if I went to a developing country.'* (Hilda)

#### **8.4.4 Realisation of the need to compete in the global market**

The students were more aware of the need to compete in the global market after coming back from the study abroad country. For instance, one interviewee mentioned that:

*'The competition is so great that we are not only competing with the locals but also others globally.'* (Megan)

This thought is supported by the fact that mobile labour is growing at a rapid rate globally (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010:169). Another interviewee regarded that attaining a global perspective from different cultures could enhance his professionalism.

*'I feel my professional development has been enhanced. It is because I could learn different methods and ideas from different places. I feel that I would have been hiding in an ivory tower in Hong Kong if I hadn't been to another part of the world. Although our professors would tell us about their*

*experience abroad, I didn't feel much or understand it much. It was very different to look at things from a French perspective while I was living in France. The things I've learnt have had a very positive impact on me. It helps me think from different perspectives. So, I think this experience would enhance my professionalism in teaching.'* (Howard)

This participant, who had studied abroad in Paris, thought that his participation not only enhanced his professional development, but also served to provide more opportunities for students to explore different cultural perspectives. He further explained that,

*'Now, I no longer confine my future career to Hong Kong. It would not be a problem if I had a chance to work as a teacher in other countries.'* (Howard)

This example illustrates that study abroad experience made this participant grow more confident about his competence in working in the global market. Ultimately, he believed that this experience helped him in acquiring competence to work in other countries. The findings are consistent with that of others (cf. Rizvi, 2005a); that the skills of inter-culturality are increasingly prized by students who believe that international education could better position them within the changing structures of the global economy.

Another interviewee revealed that having lived in a different country through a study abroad programme, she was able to self-reflect on her own needs and analyse the current environment. Consequently, she figured out, and justified, her future direction.

*'I used to wish to study abroad. Yet, since I came back from the exchange programme, I realise that until you have acquired a certain language ability, it is better to stay in Hong Kong or China. It would be very difficult to adapt to a new language environment and new friends at the same time if I did my undergraduate degree overseas. Therefore, I think it would be better that I did my undergraduate degree in Hong Kong so that it could enable me to master some fundamental knowledge before I advance to do further study overseas. Besides, I could study better by using my mother-tongue in Hong Kong.'* (Megan)



After studying abroad, Megan was grateful to be studying within her own country but was also able to articulate how she appreciated more learning in her own language in the undergraduate programme. Moreover, she rethought her future plan to study abroad for her postgraduate degree. This change is consistent with research showing that the participants were more open to new ways of thinking and developing awareness and insight into their own values and beliefs after they had studied abroad (Mapp et al., 2007).

## **8.5 Conclusion**

The findings of students' perceptions of what it meant to have a global perspective is interesting in that, although the respondents might hold a vague view of the meaning of 'global perspective', they appear to like the idea of integrating a global perspective into their existing education system. The students reflected that a global perspective is embodied in the notion of globalisation in which it is generally referred to as involving economic, cultural/social and technological dimensions. They regarded that attaining a global perspective could enrich their personal and cultural/social development. On the other hand, the students were aware of the problems and concerns raised by globalisation which incubated inequalities between developing and developed countries, and tended to lead to the homogenized of culture, in particular via the dominance of a consumer culture.

The results also suggest that the higher education students believed that attaining a global perspective through study abroad programmes was important for enhancing personal development and justification of moral and political global connectivity. The study abroad participants were found to place significantly more emphasis on the moral and political dimensions of global connectivity in terms of improving international relations and social inequality as well as solving environmental problems. Moreover, the study abroad interviewees reflected that they had an increased appreciation of different cultures, had gained a deeper understanding of globalisation, and were more aware of the need to compete in the global market

after coming back from their study abroad country. In the next chapter, I will turn to reviewing the overall concluding findings for this study and the implications of these for institutional policies, programmes and practices regarding study abroad.

# **CHAPTER NINE**

## **ATTAINMENT OF A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE THROUGH SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMMES**

### **9.0 Introduction**

This study set out to broaden our understanding of student mobility in the context of Hong Kong higher education. In particular, it investigates (1) the students' perceived value and the impact of study abroad programmes in higher education; (2) the issues students face in deciding whether they will participate in study abroad programmes; and (3) the students' views on attaining a global perspective through study abroad programmes (refer to Chapter 1). This chapter delineates the findings in relation to the research questions and its contributions to a body of knowledge. It discusses the overall implications of what this means for short-term study abroad, particularly integrating those programmes in the existing curricula as a formal component of the curriculum, institutional policies and programme implementation. It concludes by reflecting upon the significance of the methodology for studying the study phenomena, and acknowledges the limitations of this study. It suggests the need for further research, portrays my personal reflections and makes a final conclusion.

### **9.1 Findings for the Research Questions**

In this section, I summarise the key findings of this study in relation to the three research questions posed in Chapter 1. Based on the findings reported in Chapters

6, 7 and 8, firstly, I delineate the students' perceived value and impacts of short-term study abroad programmes. Secondly, I outline the issues facing students in deciding to participate in a study abroad programme, particularly the concerns hindering students' participation. Thirdly, I reveal students' views on the meaning and experience of a global perspective, and how study abroad programmes contribute to attaining a global perspective.

### *9.1.1 Students' perceived value and impacts of short-term study abroad programmes*

This study finds that the students strongly believed the greatest benefits of taking part in short-term study abroad programmes are enhancing their personal development, and understanding the social and cultural development of the host countries. Professional and academic enhancement and learning language skills were, by contrast, less valued. The latter is mainly discipline dependent because other students who studied with a non-language major might perceive the value of understanding the host country's culture more highly than that of enhancing their language skills. The least important benefit perceived by the students is the future employment opportunities created by participating in these programmes. Contrary to the general assumption that university graduates with broader international learning experience and good English will gain better chances of getting well-paid jobs (Rizvi & Lingard 2010:170), these results illustrate that this assumption is not necessarily valid for short-term study abroad programmes of the kind that students experienced in this study. This suggests that studying abroad is not viewed as a critical experiential step in leading to favorable employment opportunities.

Compared with the non study abroad respondents, the study abroad participants perceived that there were greater benefits in studying abroad in terms of helping personal growth, understanding other cultures and social development, as well as professional and academic enhancement. Often, people with different cultural backgrounds have different views on the subject. This study reveals that Mainland

Chinese students care more about professional and academic enhancement, while Hong Kong students pay more attention to personal growth.

### ***9.1.2 Concerns hindering students' decisions to study abroad***

There are various barriers hindering the students' participation in these programmes, including financial arrangements, cultural values and security issues. The questionnaire results show that financial concerns are found to be the most important issue influencing students in deciding whether they will study abroad. Paradoxically, some of the interview findings show that this concern was not the biggest hindrance when deciding whether or not to participate in an exchange or immersion programme. This might be because their home institute largely subsidises these programmes.

The second most important factor is the interest in the cultural value of studying in a different country, followed by security issues, course credit transfer, falling behind academically in the home institute, promotion from the current institute, suggestions from family and friends, being fairly treated in the host country, and being away from home for too long. Living conditions is the least important issue facing students in deciding to study abroad. The interviews reveal that the issues facing students in deciding to study abroad also differ depending on different conditions such as course credit transfer and promotion by the home institute.

One critical issue facing students in deciding to study abroad is that the non study abroad respondents showed more concern about being away from home for too long than the study abroad students. In addition, the non study abroad respondents appeared to worry more about deferring their original academic progress in the home country than the study abroad respondents. The concerns which make students hesitate to study abroad also differ according to their different backgrounds. Comparative analysis illustrates that Mainland Chinese students would more likely take living conditions into consideration for participating in study abroad programmes, while Hong Kong respondents would have more interest in the cultural value of the host country.

### *9.1.3 Students' views on the meaning and experiencing of a global perspective*

Interestingly, the questionnaire results show that the students had vague understandings of a 'global perspective' as part of the competences they might acquire while studying abroad, but they tended to integrate global perspective with their existing education system. The interview findings reflect that the interviewees' views of a global perspective are somehow related to various dimensions of globalisation. As mentioned in the data analysis, the students were aware of the dynamic of globalisation as involving economic, cultural/social and technological dimensions. One interviewee concluded these inter-influences as follows,

*'Because of the Internet, it enables information exchange between countries. In particular, economics and cultural exchange can benefit from this convenience which leads to cooperation between countries which could not happen before.'* (Hannah)

Hannah represents the views of a number of students who suggest that Internet technology enables cultural exchange and enhances cooperation opportunities between countries so as to benefit economic development. This illustrates an inter-relation between understanding different cultures and economic development. It is assumed that the skills of intercultural communication are essential for living in a global knowledge-based economy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). In addition, it further delineates that the Internet, this new form of communication, enables individuals and countries to overcome geographical boundaries that create access to a range of social and political experiences which people did not previously have an opportunity to engage in directly (Held & McGrew, 1998).

Meanwhile, study abroad interviewees' responses illustrate they were aware of the problems that globalisation might raise: (1) it might lead to homogenised consumer culture and become standardised through technological, cultural and commercial convergences; and (2) inequality might be induced between developed and developing countries through the process of globalisation.

This study's results also show that higher education students believe that enhancing personal competence in the rapidly changing global economy is the most important issue for attaining a global perspective. One might reasonably expect to see that the positive influence of studying abroad is manifested as a positive influence on students' perspectives of the moral and political dimensions of global interconnectivity. Nonetheless, it is interesting that even though the students considered that attaining a global perspective was important for the moral and political dimensions of global connectivity, such as improving international relations, and recognising their role as global citizens, they also regarded that attaining a global perspective had little influence on solving global problems, such as social inequality, environmental problems and conflicts between countries. The interview results suggest that the participants felt their individual attainment would have little influence on the international level of impact in improving social inequality or solving environmental problems. Nevertheless, they agreed that when mutual understanding of cultures between individuals was enhanced through attaining a global perspective, conflicts might then be reduced.

#### *9.1.4 Study abroad programmes are an effective means of attaining a global perspective*

This study's findings show that short-term study abroad programmes are an effective means of attaining a global perspective. Although the questionnaire findings show that attaining a global perspective has little importance in many aspects, the interview results illustrate that it has a certain value to the study abroad participants. Firstly, the study abroad respondents valued the importance of attaining a global perspective significantly more highly than the non study abroad respondents in three areas: improving international relations, solving environmental problems and improving social inequality. Secondly, all of the study abroad interviewees stressed that their intercultural understanding was enhanced after they had studied abroad. This implies that the study abroad participants not only had increased appreciation of different cultures, but they also emphasised the moral or political dimensions of global connectivity. They also

felt that study abroad programmes helping them to gain a deeper understanding of globalisation. Furthermore, they became more aware of the need to compete in the global market after coming back from their study abroad programmes. This further illustrates that higher education students believe studying abroad could better position them within the changing structures of the global economy. Hence, students' views of a global perspective appear to be sharpened through their study abroad programmes and thus these programmes serve a role as an effective means of attaining a global perspective.

## **9.2 Contributions of the Study to the Understanding of Contemporary Short-term Study Abroad Programmes in the Hong Kong Context**

One of the significances of this study is to contribute new knowledge to our understanding of contemporary short-term study abroad programmes in the Hong Kong context. This knowledge includes the benefits to the students of broader learning; a decline in the positive influence on professional and employment advantages; the popularity of the short-term study abroad destinations; and different preferences of selecting host countries between Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong students under 'one country two cultures'.

### ***9.2.1 Benefits to students of broader learning experience***

Generally, the findings reflect that most of the study abroad participants' perceived value or benefits were consistent with their perceived impacts from the study abroad programmes. This implies that most of their expectations were matched with their study abroad experiences. Broadly speaking, language barriers and overcoming cultural differences are regarded as the most difficult parts of the study abroad programmes, while learning about other cultures or cultural exchange is perceived as the best part of the programmes. Meanwhile, enhancing proficiency in the host country's language is perceived as one of the greatest impacts of the study abroad programmes. These results may suggest that study abroad students' learning could be achieved through overcoming difficulties such



as overcoming language barriers and resolving conflict. The study abroad participants unexpectedly made more international friends from other countries and built closer relationships with their peers from the home countries than with local friends in the host countries. These students' learning experiences are supported by theories such as Vygotsky's (1978) theory which suggests that all cognitive processes including language acquisition occur from social interaction; and Lave's (1988) 'Situated Learning Theory' that suggests that learning requires social interaction and collaboration and is often unintentional rather than deliberate. In sum, the students actually benefited from participating in the programmes in terms of broader and enriched learning experiences in different communities, cultures and education systems.

### ***9.2.2 Influences on professional and employment advantages***

Participants believed that there was little direct impacts on their professional and academic enhancement was perceived by the participants. However, they believed that improving their CV had a relatively high value. This not only implies that improving one's CV does not directly relate to enhancing employment opportunities in their point of view, but also reflects that there is a decline to the elite of study abroad programmes in gaining the professional and employment advantages. The rise in popularity of short-term study abroad programmes may suggest that 'student mobility is increasingly losing its exclusivity in enhancing international competences' (Rivza & Teichler, 2007: 465). Therefore, the students actually gained less benefit in getting better employment advantages by participating in the short-term study abroad programmes.

### ***9.2.3 Popularity of short-term study abroad host destinations***

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the current trend of student mobility illustrates that there is a decline in attracting international students in the US, the UK and Australia. However, this study's results show that this might not apply to Hong Kong students' preferences in choosing these countries as their short-term study abroad destinations. It is interesting that even though most of this study's

respondents were either from Hong Kong or Mainland China, China was still selected as the third most preferred destination, which may further suggest that this current market share distribution may change. This trend may suggest that China is growing in popularity as the choice of short-term study abroad destinations. This increasing popularity may be accounted for by two reasons; growing interest in the cultural value of China, and the need to improve Putonghua proficiency. As the market share of international students is predicted to change from those Western-oriented countries to other Asian countries, in particular to China, which has become one of the top host countries for all internationally mobile students, this prediction may also be true for short-term study abroad destinations.

#### ***9.2.4 Different preferences of selecting host countries between Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students under ‘one country two cultures’***

It seems that considerations given by Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students to participating in the programmes are quite different, even though they are rooted in the same Chinese cultural values and belong to the same country. Sharing most of the common issues in deciding to study abroad, Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong students are found to have different preferences in selecting host countries. The Mainland Chinese students were more likely to rank the US as their most preferred study abroad country, while the Hong Kong students tended to rank the UK as their most preferred country. This phenomenon might be explained by several reasons. Firstly, Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students are brought up in two different cultures. Mainland Chinese might be more influenced by the US culture than by UK culture through the media. Conversely, Hong Kong students are more influenced by the UK culture than by US culture because of its historical background as a former British colony before 1997. As the ‘interest of the cultural value of the country’ was considered as the most critical factor in deciding to study abroad by the respondents, the Hong Kong students regarded that the UK had a richer cultural value than the US due to its shorter national history. Secondly, as Mainland Chinese have a tendency to pursue study abroad programmes for academic and professional enhancement so as to eventually seek

better jobs, this would explain why they would prefer the United States, as it is perceived as a more advanced country in their minds. Thirdly, Hong Kong students are fonder of choosing the UK as they have a social network there for historical reasons. Some of the Hong Kong students' relatives or friends may have been living or studying in the UK. As discussed in section 9.1, the perceived value and intentions for students choosing to study abroad vary and may change over time. Student's perceived value and issues facing them in deciding to study abroad would affect the student's choice of host destination to study abroad.

### **9.3 Implications of Short-term Study Abroad Programmes**

The findings of this study have unveiled benefits, concerns, and issues, affecting various students' decisions to participate in these programmes. The implications of these findings do not simply align with take-it-for-granted student mobility through broadened learning outcomes and value-added personal development. Moreover, they point to addressing the attainment of a global perspective through study abroad programmes in the Hong Kong context. In particular, this study reveals the cultural variations between Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese as located in different preferences for joining the programmes. All these findings suggest that policymakers and university senior management internationalise curricula to suit the needs of both international and domestic students. In this section, I would like to examine the implications of short-term study abroad programmes in terms of integrating those programmes in the existing curricula as a formal component of the curriculum, institutional policies and programme implementation.

#### ***9.3.1 More than an excursion***

People often question whether studying abroad through short-term programmes is more like an excursion or extra-curricular activity built into the curriculum. Both positive and negative views on studying abroad were collected in the interviews. Some students negatively reflected that academic expectations were at a minimal

level and the lectures were not as meaningful as those in the home institute during the exchange semester.

However, other students indicated positively that studying abroad provided a new kind of everyday experience and social interaction that they had never had before. This experience was situated in a community which the students had never encountered before. It might be suggested that study abroad participants have experienced Beck's (2002:36) concept of cosmopolitanism that is characteristic of 'openness to the world and for plurality'. They evidenced that cosmopolitanism is articulated through participation in these programmes. One interviewee concluded the meaning of this study abroad experience as a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

*'Participating in the exchange programme (which lasted for one semester) is a once-in-a-lifetime experience before you graduate. My main reasons for participating in this programme were: I wanted a breakthrough in my life by learning to live in a new country...' (Howard).*

It also helps the participating students to open up their minds to accept individual societal differences. This acceptance of differences gives rise to the awareness of a global sphere (Beck, 2002). This extraordinary social experience opens cultural horizons and produces a sensitivity to those social settings they are unfamiliar with. The students' positive views of participation might encourage deep engagement in studying abroad for the benefits of whole-person development and attaining a global perspective. At least, they felt much more independent and had more decisive views of the world. The student continued:

*'...I wanted to broaden my horizons by learning more about different parts of the world.... Even though I was quite independent before I went to Paris, I wanted to be even more independent, in particular in the way I think.' (Howard)*

Undoubtedly, the study abroad programmes can provide opportunities for some students that positively and actively engage their participation in the life of the host countries, life styles, travel or work. The participants' perceived higher value of the benefits attributed to personal development and positive psychosocial confidence in experiencing the study abroad programmes. Correspondingly,

greater academic and professional growth was indirectly enhanced. They also highly valued learning by doing and attaining a global perspective which improved their social relations, at least, at a personal level, paying attention to various solutions to environmental problems, and recognising social inequality. Thus, it is unreasonable to consider the short-term study abroad programmes merely as an excursion. Instead, it can be built in as an essential component of a curriculum which benefits a wider scope of international students with the elements of experiential learning and global perspective as a coherent whole.

### ***9.3.2 Worth being invested with an appropriate level of resources: Institutional policies***

If study abroad programmes are worth investing in for the students' benefit, higher education institutions around the world should continuously develop and promote these programmes in curricula over the next two decades. The trend is growing instead of declining. The findings of this study suggest that a global perspective is important for students' personal development and further education development for preparing social capital with international awareness. Education systems worldwide tend not to prepare a small number of elite at the cost of leaving the majority of the younger generation unattended as they were in a closed education system. The more that pertinent short-term, study abroad, programmes can be offered to relevant students, the higher the chances are that the systems will facilitate the younger generation in attaining a global perspective in the midst of globalisation.

Despite its significance, financial concerns are still the most pressing issue facing students in deciding to join. A substantial amount of financial support/assistance to students is required for such development. In reality, although these activities are encouraged, there is hardly any financial or policy support from governments or institutions. For example, upon arrival in Hong Kong, international, including Mainland Chinese students, have to deal with challenges such as linguistic and socio-cultural adaptation during their stay (Gao, 2008). Therefore, the government or institutions need to consider establishing policies that are culturally sensitive

and could meet the international or Mainland Chinese students' needs. Some students revealed that short-term study abroad experiences would affect their decisions to participate in long-term study abroad programmes or to seek jobs in the global market. Hence, it is worthwhile for the government to promote short-term study abroad programmes for international students so that it may open an opportunity for them to consider future study in Hong Kong, or make this recommendation to others in their home countries. These international students may become Hong Kong's social capital if they decide to stay for work here after graduating.

In the global higher education market, the alignment of the students' expectations, institution planning, and government policy is critical. A lack of policies and financial support may seriously weaken the educational, economic, professional, socio-cultural, and political outcomes of the short-term programmes. Owing to the changing pattern in choices of host countries, the region of China and Hong Kong is becoming more and more popular worldwide. To attract international students, the higher education of the region needs a visionary integration of study abroad programmes with its sustainable development. An increasing number of foreign students are going to Mainland universities to study Chinese culture. Meanwhile, Hong Kong also boasts a unique Chinese culture rooted in the colonial period and characterised by the modern China sovereignty after 1997. The Ministry of Education of the Central Government, the Hong Kong SAR government, and higher education institutions of the region, can place more emphasis on these study abroad programmes to attract international students. Hence, education provision, academic performance and student qualities can be raised to a higher level in the context of international higher education. Thus, the implications of these positive benefits suggest expanding appropriate resources for study abroad programmes.

### ***9.3.3 Quantity or quality: Programme implementation***

Probing the insights into expanding investment in study abroad programmes based on the significant value drawn from the interviewees, I would ask, 'Should

universities focus on bigger shares of the international higher education markets by increasing the number of programme places to accept/send out more international students, or should they focus on enhancing the overall quality of the incoming students' learning experience, and render substantial support to the outgoing students?'

Even though there is a tendency towards increasing numbers of short-term study abroad programmes worldwide, only a small percentage of students participate in these programmes in Hong Kong's higher education institutions. To enhance the Hong Kong students' development and competence, expansion of study abroad programmes is necessary. According to a recent study (Rizra & Teichler, 2007), two concerns are raised for individual institutions. First, 'Is the curriculum too dense to enable students to go abroad for a limited period of time?' Second, 'Is the curriculum of the study programmes not flexible enough to carry out part of the courses abroad?' The difficulty of integrating study abroad programmes into formal curricula will be in meeting the expectations of different stakeholders, while maintaining the integrity of the curricula. Indeed, this situation points back to the new look that the internationalisation of curricula primarily works towards broadening students' personal development with global perspectives for solid student mobility opportunities.

Students have diverse perceptions of study abroad participation. The perceived value of studying abroad varies according to different programme durations, purposes and expenses. The participants in this study had specific prior values concerning the outcomes of the participation. When integrating study abroad programmes, be they short or long-term, in the curriculum, it is difficult to meet different stakeholders' needs because these needs are complex and individually different. In terms of expanding the provisions, home institutions should reduce the students' concerns such as financial concerns, course credit transfer and promotion of learning through the study abroad programmes. Home institutions' support of participating students has an important influence on students' decision making regarding joining the programmes. According to the interviewees, it is crucial that the home institutes provide sufficient financial support for each

participating student. In addition, the home institutions must handle systematic course credit exemption properly for the participating students. After all these considerations, the interviewees suggested that universities consider incorporating such programmes in their formal curricula so that each student can participate in a study abroad programme in his or her course of study.

For enhancement of the quality of the programmes, higher education institutions need to focus on evaluating their own programme structure to improve the quality of the participants' experiences. According to the interviewees, co-operation and communication among the home and host institutions and participating students could facilitate smooth processes of studying abroad. This can be a very solid support to the students from their home institutions and can also build local support for their living and adaptation to learning in the host country. The students will then feel secure about living in a strange environment for a period of time. After all, it would make the study abroad programmes more meaningful to the participants.

To sum up, I would recommend increasing the quantity of the programme places for all students with enhanced qualities. However, it is difficult to strike a balance between quantity expansion and quality enhancement in integrating short-term study abroad programmes in a curriculum.

## **9.4 Methodology for Studying this Phenomena**

Employing mixed methods for this research enabled me to reveal a broader picture of the phenomena by examining a larger sample of the questionnaire responses, and an in-depth understanding of the interview findings. The variety of questionnaire respondents from different institutions provides a richer picture of the phenomena by examining if there were any similarities or differences in the students' views among different higher institutions, educational levels, nationalities and gender. As students' perceptions are the most important perspective of this research, both the questionnaire and interviews were designed



on the basis of the student participants' self-reporting so that I could directly obtain their first-hand perceptions and experiences of participating in short-term study abroad programmes. In other words, adopting a mixed methodology comprised of quantitative and qualitative research methods by which data were collected and analysed from multi-level perspectives enhances our understanding of the complexities of student mobility phenomena.

The interactive study design model developed for this research, including one round of the questionnaire survey and two rounds of interview data and two pilot studies, as referred to in Chapter 4 (Figure 4.1), enabled me to explore the possible perspectives of research direction at the different phases of the data collection. It not only facilitated improvements in the interview and survey questions, but also enhanced the flexibility of the research in order to better understand the participants and the complexity of the phenomena. For example, I was curious about the questionnaire findings suggesting different preferences in selecting the host country for study abroad between Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong students, so I decided to ask both Mainland Chinese and Hong Kong interviewees about any possible reasons behind this result in the second-round interviews. In other words, the questionnaire findings led me to design the second-round interview questions so that I could investigate the issues in more depth.

This model also enables the interview findings and the questionnaire results to interact with, and be complementary to, each other so that we could look at the studied matters at different levels and from different angles. Furthermore, this mixed methodology with the interactive research design can also triangulate the data collected at different phases and from different groups of participants so that it could increase the reliability and validity of the research. To sum up the benefits of adopting this methodology, I anticipate that it can be replicated for other studies in different settings, and that it can serve as a pilot for a large-scale research study across countries or regions.

## 9.5 Limitations of this Study

Due to availability and time-constraints, only convenience sampling was adopted for both the survey and interview methods. For example, I did not interview students from various higher institutions as per the questionnaire respondents who were studying at eight higher institutions. As this research is an exploratory study, I did not aim to generalise the pattern of the responses.

Limited data also restricted the speculation of the findings. For example, the popularity of choosing China as a host destination in this study may suggest that the prediction that China will become one of the top host countries for all internationally mobile students may also apply to short-term study abroad programmes. However, this study was conducted mainly for Chinese students. It cannot examine the general growing popularity of China as a host destination among international students. Samples including other international students could further verify this phenomenon and get a broader sense of this trend. Since this study was only conducted in Hong Kong, it should also be noted that the views of the Mainland Chinese who participated in this study might have been influenced by their current study abroad experience in Hong Kong. In this case, the interviewees' clear indication of the source of influence could help distinguish the different influences from their Mainland China or Hong Kong study experiences.

As I, the interviewer and the researcher, am a 'Hongkonger', I realise my interpretation may be limited to a Hong Kong perspective. Involving a Mainland Chinese researcher in interpreting the findings could balance this limitation in future studies. On the other hand, as the only interviewer engaged in dialogue with the interviewees, I could discuss my theoretical views directly so that I could get a more accurate first-hand perspective from the interviewees.

The relationships or associations of the independent variables which were established in the survey may not necessarily be causal connections. For example,

the majority of students would like to choose a Western country as a host destination to study abroad, but I could not account for any cause for this phenomenon.

## **9.6 Need for Further Research**

To gain a broader view and better understand the impact of student mobility in international higher education through short-term study abroad programmes in Hong Kong, I hope to highlight a few priorities based on the insights of this study for further research. Firstly, systematic larger scale studies of student mobility through the programmes requires more in-depth analyses of different higher education institutions across different regions. Secondly, longitudinal and comparative research studies are recommended to examine to what extent the global perspective and personal development gained by the students from studying abroad affects their career and learning after graduation. Thirdly, a valid instrument to measure or compare current students' global perspective, or the impacts of study abroad programmes on attaining a global perspective, can be developed for conducting larger-scale studies. These studies are useful to higher education institutions in setting recruitment strategies of potential and capable international students. In particular, understanding students' perceived value and actual outcomes of the programmes can help higher education institutions justify more resources and support to integrate those programmes in formal curricula for every student.

## **9.7 Personal Reflections**

My initial aim in undertaking this study was to explore the influences of short-term study abroad programmes on students in higher education in relation to the perceived value and impacts of the programmes. I planned to use a qualitative approach and interview method only. Through reading the relevant literature and inspiration from my supervisor, I discovered that attainment of a global perspective is also an important influence of study abroad programmes that leads

to the discourse of internationalising higher education. Therefore, I included the third research question to investigate this issue.

As discussed in Section 9.3, the results suggest that integrating short-term study abroad programmes into formal curriculum would benefit students' development. However, these study abroad programmes do not always guarantee positive results for participating students, and unexpected effects may occur in the process. This means that student mobility through the programmes is uncertain. Hence, I begin the discussion of the idea with the following questions: Can curricula be internationalised for more inclusion than excursion? Is it worthwhile for universities to invest in international higher education markets with a broadened curriculum framework? If it is worthwhile, should quantity or quality be emphasised? Lastly, what can further research do? These questions are the basis for rethinking the internationalisation of curricula in international higher education.

Conducting this study, I have not only gained a deeper understanding of this topic, but have also developed more interest in further study. With a qualitative research background, I have also learnt more about the quantitative approach and its analysis by adopting mixed methods for this study. One main challenge of this study was that very little literature was found in the local Hong Kong context. Since the data collected was so rich that I found it difficult to decide which perspective or angle I should start from when analysing and reporting on the data, and which of the many possibilities of research that could be done were to be explored, I would like to pursue further research on this topic to contribute to the body of knowledge.

## **9.8 Conclusion**

This study discusses the significance of short-term study abroad programmes in the context of international higher education. The outcomes of this study show that short-term study abroad programmes open up opportunities for numerous

possible interactions among people from different cultural traditions, giving those students the chance to broaden their personal horizons and social/cultural awareness of society through the attainment of a global perspective.

As a consequence, the students' learning is not only enhanced but, more importantly, attaining a global perspective is a crucial means of developing their personal growth. These insightful consequences can inform policymakers and the senior management of universities in formulating national and/or institutional strategies and planning for internationalising higher education by taking serious consideration of the emerging value of student mobility through short-term study abroad programmes. Interestingly, this study also unfolds the phenomenon of "one country, two preferences" of Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students. This may contribute to enhancing the programmes on the basis of cultural variations between Hong Kong and Mainland Chinese students in choosing host countries for studying abroad. Last but not least, the methodology developed in this study can be considered as a pilot for similar research projects.

To conclude, the study abroad experiences of each participant are unique and complex. They involve the participant's expectations, the people they interact with and other matters. Finally, I would like to conclude the significance of study abroad programmes with the reflections of one of the participants.

*'Study abroad programmes not only benefit the participants, but also matter to the institutions and society. I had never imagined I could have such a good experience. It [the study abroad programme] changed my views of studying abroad and my global perspective' (Hilda)*

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## APPENDIX I

敬啓者：

### 誠邀參加問卷調查

本人現正於英國布里斯托大學修讀教育博士學位，論文題目為《探討在全球化下國內外學習交流活動對大學生的影響》。論文主要是研究在全球化下，大學生參與國內外學習交流或沉浸活動後，對其發展有何影響？

為搜集研究資料，現附上調查問卷乙份，敬希閣下能抽空作答。所有研究資料會絕對保密，參與調查者之資料亦絕不會公開，並重申所得資料只供學術研究之用。

本問卷調查共有五部分：

個人資料

甲部：你對國內外學習交流活動的看法

乙部：你對「環球視野」的看法

丙部：你考慮參與國內外學習交流活動的因素，及選擇想到國家的先後次序

丁部：國內外學習交流活動對你的影響

請在完成問卷後，把問卷封存在已付郵資之信封內，並在封口上簽名，以確保資料不會外洩。然後請將問卷直接寄回上述地址。

閣下如對上述調查問卷有任何疑問，敬祈與本人(電話：9360-3824，電郵：[ayncheng@ied.edu.hk](mailto:ayncheng@ied.edu.hk)) 或指導教授 Professor Susan Robertson (電郵：[S.L.Robertson@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:S.L.Robertson@bristol.ac.uk)) 聯絡。最後，蒙閣下參與此項研究，謹致謝忱。

此致  
各參與問卷調查者

鄭恩妮  
二零零九年八月四日

04 August 2009

Dear Participant,

### Invitation for participating in survey

My name is Annie Cheng. I am a doctoral candidate of Education at the University of Bristol. I am conducting a research study entitled 'The influences of student mobility in the scope of globalization'. The objective of this research is to gain a better understanding of the influences that study abroad programmes such as immersion or exchange programmes have on participants.

You are invited to participate by filling in the attached questionnaire. All data collected will be kept confidential and used for research purpose only. No identifiable data of an individual participant will be published or released to the public.

#### Instructions:

1. This questionnaire is composed of five parts.
  - Demographics
  - Part A: Perceived values of studying abroad
  - Part B: Importance of attaining global perspective
  - Part C: Considerations for studying abroad
  - Part D: Influences of studying abroad
2. Upon your completion of the questionnaire, please seal the given envelop with your signature to ensure its confidentiality. Then, please post it directly to me.

Your participation would be greatly appreciated. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact me at 9360-3824 and by email: [ayncheng@ied.edu.hk](mailto:ayncheng@ied.edu.hk) ; or contact my supervisor Professor Susan Robertson at [S.L.Robertson@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:S.L.Robertson@bristol.ac.uk)

Thank you for supporting this research.

Yours sincerely,



Annie Cheng.



**Demographics 個人資料**

*Please supply the following information and indicate the appropriate choice with “✓”.*

請提供下列資料，並在適當的空格內填上“✓”號。

**I am studying at... 我現正就讀於...**

The Chinese University of Hong Kong 香港中文大學	<input type="checkbox"/>
City University of Hong Kong 香港城市大學	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hong Kong Baptist University 香港浸會大學	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Hong Kong Institute of Education 香港教育學院	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Hong Kong Polytechnic University 香港理工大學	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology 香港科技大學	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lingnan University 嶺南大學	<input type="checkbox"/>
The University of Hong Kong 香港大學	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others (Please specify)其他( 請註明)	<input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Programme 課程:</b>	Bachelor <input type="checkbox"/>	Master <input type="checkbox"/>	PhD <input type="checkbox"/>	Others (Please specify):		
<b>Year 年級:</b>	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>	4 <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	Others (Please specify):
<b>Major 主科:</b>						

<b>Sex 性別:</b>	M男 <input type="checkbox"/>	F女 <input type="checkbox"/>		
<b>Age 年齡:</b>	≤19 <input type="checkbox"/>	20 – 24 <input type="checkbox"/>	25 – 29 <input type="checkbox"/>	≥30 <input type="checkbox"/>

<b>Nationality 國籍:</b>	HKSAR 中國香港 <input type="checkbox"/>
	People’s Republic of China 中國 <input type="checkbox"/>
	Others (Please specify):

**I have lived in Hong Kong for 已在港居住：**

Less than three months (少於 3 個月)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Three months to one year (3 個月至 1 年)	<input type="checkbox"/>
One to four years (1 年至 4 年)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Four to ten years (4 年至 10 年)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ten years or above (10 年或以上)	<input type="checkbox"/>

**I have participated in 我曾參與：**

Exchange programme ONLY 國內外學習交流活動	<input type="checkbox"/>
Immersion programme ONLY 沉浸活動	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exchange <u>AND</u> Immersion programmes 國內外學習交流及沉浸活動	<input type="checkbox"/>
None of the above 以上任何一種活動都沒有	<input type="checkbox"/>

Direction 指示

For each statement below, put a “ ✓ ” within the box which represents the degree of your agreement.

請就以下每一句子所述情況，在適當的空格內填上“ ✓ ”號。

PART A (甲部)

Part A is to ask your views on the perceived values of study abroad programme.

甲部：你對國內外學習交流活動的看法

I believe that participating in exchange or immersion programme can... 我認為參加國內外學習交流活動會...		Strongly Disagree 非常不同意	Disagree 不同意	Undecided/Neutral 未能決定/中立	Agree 同意	Strongly agree 非常同意
A1	Enhance my proficiency in the host country's language 增強個人使用該國語言之能力					
A2	Help me to learn to be independent 學習到獨立					
A3	Broaden my horizons 擴闊個人視野					
A4	Assist my personal growth 幫助個人成長					
A5	Build closer relationships with the students I go with from the same institution 加深與同行同學之友誼					
A6	Make local friends in the host country 認識到該國朋友					
A7	Make international friends from other countries, other than those of the host country 認識到其他國家的朋友					
A8	Provide me with great opportunities to travel 使我得到更多旅遊機會					
A9	Learn about the culture of the host country 學習到所到國家的文化					
A10	Learn about different cultures from other international students studying in the host country 學習到其他國家的文化					
A11	Enhance my academic performance 使我學業成績進步					
A12	Help me to develop new study habits/skills 助我發展新的學習模式					
A13	Enhance my professional skills and knowledge 增強我的專業知識及技能					
A14	Improve my CV 豐富我的個人履歷					

A15	Enhance my future employment opportunities 增加將來就業機會					
A16	Defer my original academic progress in the home country 延遲我的畢業時間					
A17	Help my future migration opportunities 幫助我 日後移民					
A18	Increase my awareness of globalization 增加了我對全球化之體會					
A19	Learn about new perspectives from my own country 使我對自己國家有新體會					
A20	Enhance my view of national identity 加深自己對國民身份之看法					

**PART B (乙部)**

**Part B is to ask your views on the values on attaining global perspective.**  
**乙部：你對「環球視野」的看法**

I think ‘global perspective’ is important to 我認為「環球視野」重要的是能...		Strongly Disagree 非常不同意	Disagree 不同意	Undecided/Neutral 未能決定/中立	Agree 同意	Strongly agree 非常同意
B1	Improve international relations 改善國際關係					
B2	Solve conflicts between countries 解決國家之間的衝突					
B3	Solve environmental problems 改善環境問題					
B4	Acknowledge my global citizenship 使我確認環球公民的身份					
B5	Advance the economic growth of my own country 促進自己國家的經濟增長					
B6	Enable individuals to compete in the current world 使人在現今世界上有競爭力					
B7	Improve social inequality 改善社會不公平現象					
B8	Enhance international economic development 促進國際經濟發展					

B9	Enable individuals to react to the rapid pace of global change使人對現今世界的快速轉變作出反應					
B10	Be integrated into the education system I am in.能融合在自己置身的教育制度中					
B11	I have no idea what 'global perspective' is.我不大理解什麼是「環球視野」					

PART C (丙部)

Part C is to ask your considerations and preference for participating in studying abroad programmes.

丙部：請說明你考慮參與國內外學習交流活動的因素，以及選擇想到之國家的先後次序

If you have a chance to participate in an exchange or immersion programme, which country would you prefer? Please rank according to your preference. '1' is the most preferred, '2' is the second most preferred country, '3' is the third most preferred country and so forth (max. to '9').

你如有機會參加國內外學習交流活動,你會選擇以下那些國家？請按先後次序選擇, '1'為最想去之國家, '2'為第二最想去之國家, '3'為第三最想去之國家, 如此類推 (最多可選9項).

國家	請排列優先次序
Australia 澳洲	
China 中國	
France法國	
Germany德國	
UK英國	
US美國	
Others (Please specify) 其他( 請註明國家)	
Others (Please specify) 其他( 請註明國家)	
Others (Please specify) 其他( 請註明國家)	

My considerations for participating in exchange or immersion programme include or have included... 我考慮會否參與國內外學習交流或沉浸活動的因素包括...		Strongly Disagree 非常不同意	Disagree 不同意	Undecided/Neutral 未能決定/中立	Agree 同意	Strongly agree 非常同意
C1	Financial concerns 財政					
C2	Being away from home for too long 會否離家太久					
C3	Course credit transfer issues 學分能否獲得本校認可					
C4	Living conditions such as food or habits in the host country 當地飲食或生活習慣					
C5	Falling behind academically in my home institution 在本校學習之進度會否受阻					
C6	Being fairly treated in the host country 會否在當地受不公平對待					
C7	Suggestions from family or friends 家庭或朋友之意見					
C8	Security issues 安全問題					
C9	The promotion or encouragement by my current institution 學院對參與學習交流活動之鼓勵或推廣					
C10	My interests in the cultural values of the host country 對當地文化之興趣					

**PART D (丁部)**

**Part D is to ask about the influences of participating in studying abroad programme on you.**

**丁部：請說明參與過國內外學習交流活動後對你的影響**

**PART D.1**

**Have you ever participated in any Student Exchange or Immersion activities organized by your institution?**

**你曾否參與過你的院校舉辦之國內外學習交流或沉浸活動？**

YES 曾參與    ☐ → Please go to請到 PART D.2

NO 未曾參與    ☐ → End of Questionnaire. Thank you for your participation. 問卷完畢，謝謝。

PART D.2

Please identify the host country(s) and the duration of the programme(s) in terms of weeks or months you have participated.  
請指出你曾到過之國家及為期多久 (可選多於一項)

Country 國家	Duration 為期	
	Week(s)星期	Month(s)月
Australia 澳洲		
China 中國		
France法國		
Germany德國		
UK英國		
US美國		
Others (Please specify) 其他( 請註明國家)		
Others (Please specify) 其他( 請註明國家)		
Others (Please specify) 其他( 請註明國家)		

The exchange or immersion programme(s) have had the following impact on me. 這些國內外學習交流或沉浸活動對我的影響是...		Strongly Disagree 非常不同意	Disagree 不同意	Undecided/Neutral 未能決定/中立	Agree 同意	Strongly agree 非常同意
D1	Enhanced my proficiency in the host country's language 增強個人使用該國語言之能力					
D2	Helped me to learn to be independent學習到獨立					
D3	Broadened my horizons 擴闊個人視野					
D4	Assisted my personal growth 幫助個人成長					
D5	Built closer relationships with the students I went with from the same institution 加深與同行同學之友誼					
D6	Made local friends in the host country 認識到該國朋友					
D7	Made international friends from other countries, other than those of the host country 認識到其他國家的朋友					

D8	Provided me with great opportunities to travel 使我得到更多旅遊機會					
D9	Learnt about the culture of the host country 學習所到國家的文化					
D10	Learnt about different cultures from other international students studying in the host country 學習到其他國家的文化					
D11	Enhanced my academic performance 使我學業成績進步					
D12	Helped me to develop new study habits/skills 助我發展新的學習模式					
D13	Enhanced my professional skills and knowledge 增強我的專業知識及技能					
D14	Improved my CV 豐富我的個人履歷					
D15	Enhanced my future employment opportunities 增加將來就業機會					
D16	Deferred my original academic progress in my home institution 延遲我的畢業時間					
D17	Helped my future migration 幫助我日後移民					
D18	Increased my awareness of globalization 增加了我對全球化之體會					
D19	Learnt new perspectives of my own country 使我對自己國家有新體會					
D20	Increase my awareness of different political environments 加強我對不同政治體系的覺察力					
D21	Felt discriminated against in some way 曾感受到被歧視					
D22	This experience matched my prior expectation 這經驗合乎我之前的期望					
D23	This is a valuable experience 這是一次有用的經驗					

D24. Please choose one of the following statements that best describes your change of view of national identity. 請選擇其中一句最能表達你對個人國民身份看法的改變

- A) More proud of being Chinese  
學習交流之後更加以身為中國人而感到自豪 ☐
- B) Hong Kongers are very different from Mainland Chinese  
學習交流之後更覺得香港人與中國人身份不同 ☐
- C) No change in the view of national identity  
學習交流之後沒有改變自己對國民身份之看法 ☐
- D) Others (Please specify)  
其他(請註明)\_\_\_\_\_

D25. What was the best part of the study abroad programme you participated in? 你認為所參與過的國內外學習交流活動中最好的部分是甚麼？

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D26. What was the most difficult part of the study abroad programme you participated in? 你認為所參與過的國內外學習交流活動中最困難的部分是甚麼？

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D27. Would you recommend study abroad programme to others?  
你會否推薦國內外學習交流活動給其他人？

YES 會 ☐ → Why? 因為\_\_\_\_\_

NO 不會 ☐ → Why not? 因為\_\_\_\_\_

**End of Questionnaire 問卷完**

Data collected will be treated with the strictest confidence.  
收集所得的資料將會嚴格保密

Thank you 感謝!